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Mystery Magazine

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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a *NEW* "library fuzz" story by

JAMES HOLDING

Mrs. J. W. Stout, who lived in the swanky Scottish Arms, had 12 books from the public library that were five and one-half weeks overdue. She owed $18.90 in fines, and Hal Johnson, the library sleuth, was not about to let her get away with it. But "the sissy cop" (that's what headquarters called Hal) didn't know what he was letting himself in for. . .

THE ELUSIVE MRS. STOUT

by JAMES HOLDING

It was ten minutes before nine o'clock on a cool September morning when I guided my old Chevy into the parking lot of The Scottish Arms.

The Scottish Arms is a twenty-story residential tower of stainless steel and marble, a very exclusive address. It stands in lonely grandeur on the eastern outskirts of the city where there's plenty of room for ground-level parking and no urgent necessity for rich (and usually elderly) tenants to tool in and out of a smelly subterranean garage every time they want to take a drive.

I left the Chevy angled into the curb at a spot marked GUEST, and headed for the main entrance to the apartment house, thinking with amusement how forlorn my battered car looked in the midst of the shiny Cadillacs, Continentals, and Imperials belonging to the tenants of The Scottish Arms.

I was glad, though, that my first call that day was at The Scottish Arms. For although I'm only a library cop who specializes, if you can call it that, in recovering stolen and overdue books for the public library, I like to start my day out with a little class as much as anyone.

The main lobby of The Scottish Arms was classy, all right, if you think fake Neo-Gothic verticality is classy. Everything was tall and narrow, from the entrance doors and

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tinted windows to the long thin crystal tubes that made up the chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

Mrs. J. W. Stout, in apartment 18B, was the object of my researches this morning among the well-to-do. Where most women who dwelt in The Scottish Arms, if they read books at all, probably bought them by the carton from their book clubs or booksellers, my Mrs. J. W. Stout was apparently a girl who borrowed books by the bagful from the public library—and forgot to bring them back. According to my list she had 12 books—all new fiction titles—that were now five and one-half weeks overdue and had accumulated fines to the grand total of $18.90—a magnificent fine, even for a resident of The Scottish Arms.

There are a lot of reasons why people who borrow books from the public library fail to return them on time. Mrs. J. W. Stout's reason, I was quite sure, was merely forgetfulness: in the flurry and confusion of other interests, Mrs. Stout simply forgot about her library books. That she must *have* outside interests seemed evident, because she was never at home. I'd come to apartment 18B on three separate occasions in the past two weeks to collect her books and fines and I had yet to find her at home. But this morning she had answered my phone call, and promised to wait for me.

I crossed the lobby to the elevators, entered an empty car, and pushed the button for the eighteenth floor. When the car whispered to a stop and the doors slid soundlessly open, I stepped out into a circular landing, deeply carpeted. Not counting the elevator doors, there were only three doors opening onto this small lobby. One was the door to the firestairs. One had the gilded inscription 18A on it, just under the round peephole. And the third door was mine—rather, Mrs. Stout's—18B.

I walked over to it and pressed the button. I could hear chimes faintly through the door, sending musical notes throughout Mrs. Stout's apartment to announce my arrival.

Nothing happened.

I waited patiently for a minute. Then I thumbed the button again and waited some more. Still nothing. At first I was surprised, next puzzled, and finally, as no response came to my ringing, irritated.

I leaned close to the door and listened for sounds of movement behind it. I heard nothing. Applying one eye to the peephole, I tried to look inside, but without success. The

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peephole gave only one-way vision. People inside could see out, but people outside could not see in. All that the people outside could see was a distorted reflection of themselves in the peephole.

Irritation won out over surprise and puzzlement. I turned away from 18B and tramped through the thick rug to the door of 18A and gave *that* button a good solid treatment. I suppose my rising temper must have been reflected in the violence with which I pressed the button, because it wasn't more than thirty seconds until the door opened with a snap and I was facing a middle-aged woman with dyed blonde hair and no eyebrows at all. She was apparently just getting up, because she had on a silk dressing gown of indeterminate color, somewhere between violet and purple, flowered bedroom slippers on her small feet, and held a half-eaten piece of toast in one hand.

The skin where her eyebrows should have been rose questioningly when she saw me. "Yes?" she asked in a no-nonsense voice, and then, before I could reply, she added fretfully, "I'm not *up* yet, for heaven's sake! It's so *early!* Who are you?"

"Hal Johnson," I said. "From the public library." I showed her my identification card. "I called to collect some overdue books from your neighbor, Mrs. Stout, but she doesn't seem to be at home."

"She's never home," said 18A. "Vera's busy, busy, busy. So what do you want from me? I haven't any overdue books. And I'm right in the middle of my breakfast."

"I'm sorry to disturb you," I said. "I thought perhaps you would know if Mrs. Stout has gone out. I telephoned her early this morning that I was coming for her books and she said she'd stick around until I got here."

18A laughed. "Vera's got a memory like a sieve," she said. "She probably forgot you the minute she put down the phone."

"Probably," I said, sighing. "You didn't see or hear her leave, did you?"

"Of course not! Do you think I spy on my neighbors? Especially a dear friend like Vera?" She put the rest of her toast into her mouth and chewed daintily. "Her husband left for work a while ago, that's all I know. But Vera wasn't with him. He was talking to some other man in the elevator. I could hear him." She swallowed. "That was when I opened my door to get my morning newspaper."

"Well, thanks," I said. "I

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guess I'll just have to try her again."

"Do that. Only next time you can save yourself the trip all the way up here to the eighteenth floor by checking first to see if Vera's car is in the parking lot. If it's not there, you'll know Vera isn't here, either."

"I'll remember that," I said. "What kind of car does she drive?"

"Green Pontiac," she said, closing the door. She would be quite an attractive woman, I thought, once she penciled in her eyebrows for the day. I hoped her breakfast coffee was still hot.

I rang for the elevator, dropped to the lobby, and walked out to the parking lot, still more than a little miffed at Mrs. Stout for standing me up. If you're rich, you can afford to be forgetful, I suppose.

I got into my Chevy and was backing out to leave when I noticed that the two parking slots next to mine were marked 18B. One for Mr. Stout, no doubt, and the other for Mrs. Stout. Mr. Stout's slot was empty. In the other one stood a green Pontiac.

I hesitated, then pulled back into my GUEST slot, telling myself I was damned if a scatterbrained, forgetful woman was going to get the better of me in a matter involving 12 library books and a fat fine of $18.90. Mrs. Stout had probably been standing behind her door the whole time I was ringing her chimes, watching me through her peephole!

I marched myself back into the main lobby of The Scottish Arms and went over to the elevator. The indicator dial showed a car on its way up. The light for the 18th floor came on and stayed red for a few seconds; the elevator had obviously stopped there. All at once I felt certain it had been summoned to bring my elusive Mrs. Stout down to one of her outside activities, now that the bothersome man from the library had been gotten rid of.

I grinned at the thought. I would stop her as she stepped out of the elevator. If necessary, I'd make a real nuisance of myself. Unless it was the eyebrowless lady from 18A who was descending? Hardly likely, I thought; she must still be without her eyebrows and in her dressing gown. However, I'd better be sure before I acted.

I stepped to one side of the elevator door and took cover behind a large artificial plant in a massive blue pot.

It wasn't a woman, however, who stepped from the elevator. It was a man. A man who, from his back view as he crossed the

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lobby, seemed to be on the youngish side, with medium-long black hair curling over the collar of his plaid sports coat. He moved jauntily, as though very pleased about something.

I need hardly say that he took the wind right out of my sails. For now it appeared there might be more to Mrs. J. W. Stout than met the eye. Was she not only an embezzler of books from the public library, but also an immoral wife who clandestinely entertained young men in her private apartment only minutes after her husband, poor hardworking fellow, had left for the office? If so, no wonder she had refused to answer her door.

Yet why did she tell me to come for my books this morning if she expected her young man's visit to coincide with mine? Simple. She hadn't expected her boy friend, if that's what he was, to arrive when he did. But, I asked myself severely, what if the guy was the husband of the lady in 18A? Or *her* boy friend? Or somebody who just happened to emerge from the firestairs on the 18th floor and take the elevator the rest of the way down? Or even, perhaps, a door-to-door salesman, canvassing The Scottish Arms in defiance of the sign in the main lobby forbidding it?

All the while I was mulling this over, I was skulking out to the parking lot behind the young man in question, keeping far enough behind him to interpose several Cadillacs and Continentals between his back and my eyes.

He went straight to Mrs. Stout's green Pontiac.

He climbed behind the wheel and started the engine.

That eliminates the lady in 18A, I told myself, watching him turn into Spartan Drive and head west in the Pontiac. And that eliminates the firestairs stranger, too, I thought, and the door-to-door salesman. So what am I left with? Either Mrs. Stout's boy friend, or—I fired up my Chevy and backed around—a guest of Mrs. Stout's who, for some reason unknown, refused to allow her to answer my ring at her doorbell. Or someone who, in Mrs. Stout's absence, refused to answer her doorbell himself. But why?

I turned the Chevy west on Spartan Drive and almost cheerfully began to follow Mrs. Stout's green Pontiac through the early-morning traffic. I kept asking myself why I was neglecting my own job to pry into the private affairs of Mrs. J. W. Stout whom I had never even met but who owed the public library the astonishing fine of $18.90. I had no good

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answer to this question, yet my foot kept bearing down on the accelerator and my eyes stayed doggedly fixed on Mrs. Stout's car, now being driven toward an unknown destination by an unknown young man.

Still, I reflected, I was my own boss. Why shouldn't I indulge my natural curiosity if I wanted to? And I wanted to. I had a definite feeling about the young man in Mrs. Stout's Pontiac.

We went at moderate speed through Elmersville and Conshocklie, heading over west. I stayed on the Pontiac's trail, but far enough back to avoid, I hoped, the attention of the young man driving it. Once we hit the four-lane interstate from Conshocklie west, I could make an accurate guess as to where we were going.

The Tricounty Airport. There wasn't anything else out this way except 75 uninspiring miles of farmland between the airport and Culmertown. Ten minutes later the Pontiac turned into the airport. I turned in after it and followed it, not too closely, until it entered the huge east parking lot, whereupon I turned the other way, into the west lot. I took my ticket from the gatekeeper, parked the Chevy in the first vacant place I came to, and made for the terminal building.

Mrs. Stout's young man was there before me. When I came into the domed rotunda, I saw him standing in the queue of passengers before the Eastern Airlines counter. He had an Eastern ticket in his hand but no luggage of any kind.

I went to the newsstand that flanks Eastern's counter on the left and pretended to be looking through a copy of a magazine. From the corner of my eye I saw my quarry gain the counter and hand his ticket to the clerk. I came to the front of the newsstand in time to hear the clerk's words as he gave the ticket back to Mrs. Stout's young man after checking it. "Flight 837," he said. "Departure Gate 6."

I turned my back quickly and bent my head over my magazine as he idled momentarily in the open corridor and then headed for the airport lunchroom, designated by a sign over its entrance as The Coronado Restaurant.

Casually I trailed after him, pausing at Eastern's counter only long enough to note from the posted departure schedule that Flight 837 for St. Louis departed at 10:45.

The wide glass partition that separated The Coronado Restaurant from the terminal rotunda gave me an unobstructed view of the interior.

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Mrs. Stout's young man was settling himself on a high stool among a dozen or so other customers at the quick-service counter. He was tapping his fingers in a relaxed way on the countertop as he waited for a menu. The wall clock in the restaurant showed the time to be 10:03.

I began to feel pretty silly, spying on a citizen who was probably quite innocent of any wrongdoing. He *had* to be either Mrs. Stout's lover, I told myself, or a friend or a relative. He'd had her car keys, hadn't he? And there had been nothing furtive or surreptitious about his actions. Casual, untroubled, and jaunty—that was Mrs. Stout's young man. I still had a feeling about him, though. Maybe it was his jaunty air.

He put sugar and cream into the coffee the waitress brought him and stirred it languidly with a spoon. While he did so, his eyes sought the lunchroom entrance doors several times.

That decided me. I went over to the rank of pay phones along the far wall of the rotunda, closed myself into one of the booths, dropped my dime, dialed police headquarters, and asked for Lieutenant Randall. I'd worked under him for several years in the detective division of the city police.

When I got through to him he said, "Lieutenant Randall," in a noncommittal voice.

"Hal Johnson," I said. "I've got a problem you might be able to help me with, Lieutenant."

"Really, Hal? *You* need help? A smart ex-cop like you?" His tone was dulcet but dripped with sarcasm.

"A police problem, Lieutenant," I said. "At least it *could* be. You can help me find out."

His manner changed at once. "What is it, Hal?"

I told him about my abortive call on Mrs. Stout and about the young man who had driven off in her car so blithely, and that I now knew where said young man could be reached if it developed he *had* done anything to break the law.

"Where are you now?" Randall went right to the heart of it.

"The airport. I can see our young man from this pay phone."

"Oh?" He waited for more.

"Yeah. He's having coffee in the lunchroom. His flight for St. Louis leaves in exactly forty minutes."

"What do you suggest?"

"Send a radio car to The Scottish Arms. Check on Mrs. Stout's apartment. Get a look inside it on some excuse or other. Suspected auto theft,

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maybe. Or an anonymous tip that her place has been burglarized. Then call me back here and let me know the score."

"I guess I can do that."

"Thanks." I gave him the number of the pay phone I was using. "I'll wait right here until I hear from you."

"Give me fifteen minutes."

I half opened the door of the telephone booth, leaned against it, and waited as patiently as I could to find out whether I was a suspicious fool or a very perceptive library cop. Mrs. Stout's young man went right on drinking his coffee, unperturbed. His head, though, it seemed to me, turned more frequently toward the lunchroom doors with the slow passage of time. I took what comfort I could from that while I waited.

I smoked two cigarettes down to nubbins before the telephone at my elbow jangled. I glanced at my wrist watch as I closed the door and took down the receiver. I had to hand it to Randall. Seventeen and one-half minutes.

I said into the phone, "Well?"

"Car 67 just reported finding your Mrs. Stout tied into a chair and gagged with a napkin in apartment 18B of The Scottish Arms."

I blew out my breath. "What does she say happened?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"She's in shock. Fainted. Went out like a light when they untied her. That guy of yours still there?"

"Finishing his coffee."

"Grab him," Randall said. "I've got two men on the way."

"Grab him! Listen, Lieutenant, he's twice as big as I am and half as old. I need help."

"You're getting it."

"What if your men can't make it here before Flight 837 leaves?"

He hesitated. Then, "Stay where you are. I'll call the airport police to lend you a hand. Okay?"

"Okay." I hung up.

I figured it ought to take the Lieutenant about two minutes to alert the airport police. That would still give us plenty of time to detain Mrs. Stout's young man before plane time. I began to relax a little as I waited for the airport cops to show.

Somebody else showed first. A tall heavy-set man, in his thirties, left the Eastern check-out counter and went like a homing pigeon to the lunchroom stool to the right of the one occupied by the guy who stole Mrs. Stout's Pontiac. He wore a conservative business

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suit, polished black shoes, a narrow Establishment-type necktie. He carried an oversize brief case in one hand.

As he settled himself on his stool, he said a few words to his neighbor. Then they both glanced up at the wall clock and the newcomer said something to the waitress behind the counter. After that, conversation languished. My nerves tightened up again. Now there seemed to be two malefactors for me to handle—and the new one was even bigger and more formidable than the first one.

Oh, well, I thought, counting the airport police and me, and Randall's troops, there would be at least five of us to their two. The trouble was, I was still all by myself on the battle line and the time for Flight 837's departure was drawing closer.

I lit another cigarette. It tasted awful.

Presently two husky men with airport police patches on their shirt sleeves drifted up to my telephone booth and raised their eyebrows at me. I nodded, stepped out of the booth, and drew them across the rotunda until we were out of sight of the lunchroom counter. Then I said, "Listen, there are two men in the lunchroom—'

"Two?" said one of the cops in surprise. "City police said one."

"He's been joined by a pal," I said, "and the lunchroom's half full of people, so you can't operate in there. Too many bystanders might get hurt."

"Then where?" asked the second cop.

"How about the gate before they board their plane? Flight 837. Eastern. Gate 6. I don't want them to see your sleeve patches, though. They might smell a rat."

"We'll put on jackets. How do we recognize them?"

I said, "I'll go into the restaurant and keep an eye on them until their flight is called. And an eye out for the city cops who are on their way. When the two you want approach the barrier to be processed by the skyjacking machine, I'll be right behind them, maybe with the city cops, too. I'll tip you the sign. The main thing is, I don't want anybody hurt."

"Neither do we." And they drifted off.

I swallowed a dry lump in my throat and walked into the lunchroom. Threading my way between tables I came to rest on the stool at the counter at the left of Mrs. Stout's young man. The clock on the wall said it was now 10:28. Seventeen minutes until flight time. I ordered coffee from the waitress when she came along. It

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was black and strong and when I took a gulp of it I burned my tongue. I wondered idly whether Lieutenant Randall's men would get there in time for zero hour.

At 10:32 the man beside me turned his head my way and spoke in a slow soft drawl. "Look under the counter," he murmured.

I was startled. "Under the counter?"

"Yeah."

I looked under the counter. His hand, lying in his lap and partially concealed by his yellow lunchroom napkin, held a short-barreled gun pointed at my right kidney.

"What's that for?" I said, forcing myself to take another sip of coffee.

"For curious old jerks who don't mind their own business." He smiled at me.

His friend with the narrow necktie was looking at him sideways. "What's all this?" he said in a bored voice.

"This guy was snooping at Stout's apartment an hour ago," the younger man explained. "Ringing the doorbell. Trying to get in." He turned a cold colorless stare on me and moved the gun in his lap. "You followed me here from The Scottish Arms. Why? You a cop?"

"A cop?" I tried to laugh but it came out hollow and shaky. I was thinking what a brainless dummy I'd been to come boldly into the lunchroom, drawing attention to myself. For this guy had obviously viewed my rugged features before—through the peephole in Mrs. Stout's apartment door. So naturally he recognized me the minute I sat down beside him in the lunchroom.

His friend didn't seem unduly worried. He calmly drained the last of his coffee, glanced once more at the wall clock. "I think he has to go to the Men's Room," he said with the suggestion of a smile.

Mrs. Stout's young man nodded. "Good a place as any." He motioned to the waitress for their checks. Then he asked her for mine, too. I kept quiet. If you've ever had a gun barrel only four inches from your kidney you'll understand why.

The man with the narrow tie took the checks, reached under his stool for his brief case, and headed for the cashier's desk. Under his breath he said, "Meet you on the plane, Joe." His manner was composed.

Joe slipped his gun into his side jacket pocket but he kept his hand on it. "Men's Room," he said to me. "No tricks."

Meekly I preceded him out of the lunchroom into the

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rotunda, down the transverse corridor toward a sign that said MEN in brass nailheads. Joe was only a step behind me, practically breathing down my neck. The loudspeakers began to call Flight 837. The man with the brief case wandered off toward Gate 6.

I didn't know what Joe had in mind for me in the Men's Room, but I knew it wouldn't be pleasant. In fact, it might even be fatal if the room should happen, by ill chance, to be empty when we got there.

My luck was running sour. The Men's Room was as empty as a sleep-walker's eyes.

"Well, well," said Joe's soft drawl over my shoulder. "Go into the stall at the far end, baby." I risked looking back at him for an instant. All I saw was his hand coming out of his jacket pocket, still holding the gun, only now he was holding it by the barrel. I breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed I was going to get conked with a gun butt. That's bad enough. But it's much better than getting shot in the kidney.

I stepped briskly, therefore, to the end stall. I was almost there when I heard a soft thud behind me. I risked another glance behind. And this time I saw a beautiful sight.

Joe was still behind me, but he had come to a sudden stop. Both hands, including the one holding his gun like a club, were raised above his head. Over his shoulder grinned the homely Irish face of Detective Second Class Herb O'Neill, and close behind *him* loomed Detective Third Class Terry Shenkin who was reaching up a hand to relieve Joe of his short-barreled gun. The reason for the tableau was that O'Neill had his own police positive shoved into the small of Joe's back so hard I expected to see its snout emerge from his belt buckle. The soft thud I'd heard was the Men's Room door closing.

I turned around. O'Neill said, "Is this the monkey Lieutenant Randall wants, Hal?"

"Yeah," I said weakly.

"Good. Cuff him and we'll take him out to the car," O'Neill said to Shenkin.

I looked at my watch. "We can pick up another monkey to go with him if we hurry," I said. "At Gate 6. We've got four minutes."

Shenkin put the cuffs on Joe who hadn't said a word, not even a four-letter one, since my friends arrived. O'Neill and I ran out of the Men's Room and put on speed for Gate 6.

"Where'd you drop from?" I panted as we hurried along.

"Came into the terminal and saw you coming out of the

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lunchroom with that monkey walking too close behind you in what we call a threatening posture," O'Neill said. "No magic about it, Hal."

"For me it was magic," I said. "Thanks, Herb. Now slow down."

We approached Gate 6. I spotted the two airport cops idling in the crowd around the boarding gate. Joe's pal with the narrow tie was standing fifth in the line of passengers, waiting his turn for the skyjacking frisk. Every few seconds he turned his head to check on whether Joe was going to make the plane.

I ducked my head and brushed imaginary dust off my trousers just in time. He didn't see me. As soon as his back was toward us again, I snaked through the crowd, O'Neill trailing, to one of the airport cops and said to him, "This is O'Neill, city police. And the fifth man in the boarding line is the one we want."

"You said there was two," he said, giving me a funny look. I didn't blame him.

"We nailed him upstairs. Can you take this one? The guy with the narrow necktie?"

"We can take him. Come on, Al," he said to his partner. They had put dark jackets on over their police shirts.

"I'll be right behind you if you need me," O'Neill said. It was their turf.

They didn't need him. Or me, either. They closed in from behind on the big man and took him out of the crowd at the boarding gate like the professionals they were. One on each arm, holding him up as though he'd grown suddenly faint, murmuring soothing remarks to the people nearby about getting him to the sick bay. It was slickly done.

The guy was too surprised to do much more than struggle weakly as they led him out of the crowd. By the time they bundled him over to O'Neill and me, waiting behind a soft-drink machine, everybody had turned back to the boarding gate and forgotten all about him.

"Thanks a million, boys," I said to the airport cops. Then to O'Neill, "You want to take the prisoner? I'll take the brief case."

I got the best of that bargain. For the brief case contained $92,000 in hundreds, fifties, twenties, and tens. The paper bands around the bundles of bills said FIRST FIDELITY SAVINGS AND LOAN.

"Yeah," Lieutenant Randall told me five minutes later when I telephoned him from a pay phone to report the money, "your Mrs. Stout's husband is

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the big boss at First Fidelity. We just got a call ten minutes ago that his secretary found him locked in his private can at the office, out cold, gagged and tied up. And the cashier says there's ninety-two thousand missing from the vault. Looks like you found it, Hal."

"Lucky me," I said. "So that's how they worked it, hey? Forced their way into Stout's apartment and Joe held Mrs. Stout hostage while his buddy went with Mr. Stout to his office and made him cooperate in getting the dough from the vault or Joe would do something violent to Mrs. Stout?"

"And arranged to meet at the airport and leave town," Randall said. "The Stouts will tell us about it when they're fit to talk. Both are in the hospital —shock and mild concussion."

"Too bad," I said. "I hope there's a reward, Lieutenant. I could use some extra dough."

"No reward. The insurance company doesn't even know First Fidelity was robbed and we've already recovered the loot. So why a reward?"

"Something to show for my wasted morning," I said.

Randall laughed. "Don't pester me with your little problems," he said. "I got enough of my own. Send in the ninety-two grand with O'Neill and the hoods, will you?"

"No," I said.

"No?"

"I'll send in exactly $91,981.10," I said. "I'm keeping the $18.90 that Mrs. Stout owes me in library fines. And if First Fidelity is out of balance tonight, that's *their* problem!"

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a *NEW* Appleby novelet by

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A QUESTION OF CONFIDENCE

by MICHAEL INNES

Bobby Appleby (successful scrum-half retired, and author of that notable anti-novel, *The Lumber Room*) had been down from Oxford for a couple of years. But he went back from time to time, sometimes for the day and sometimes on a weekend basis. He had a number of clever friends there who were now busily engaged in digging in for life. They had become, that is to say, junior dons of one or another more or less probationary sort, and had thereby risen from the austerities of undergraduate living to the fleshpots and the thrice-driven beds of down associated with Senior Common Rooms and High Tables. They liked entertaining Bobby, to whom *The Lumber Room* rather than his athletic prowess lent, in their circle, a certain prestige. One of these youths was a historian called Brian Button.

Button sometimes came home with Bobby to Long Dream. Sir John Appleby (policeman retired) rather liked this acquaintance of his son's, and was even accustomed to

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address him as B.B.—this seemingly with some elderly facetious reference to the deceased art historian Bernhard Berenson. Bobby's B.B. (unlike the real B.B.) came from Yorkshire, a region of which Bobby's father approved.

So Appleby was quite pleased when, chancing to look up from his writing table on a sunny Saturday morning, he saw Bobby's ancient Porsche stationary on the drive, with Bobby climbing out of the driver's seat and B.B. out of the other. But the young men were unprovided with suitcases, which was odd.

The young men bolted for the front door as if through a thunderstorm, which was odder still. And seconds later—what was oddest of all—the young men burst without ceremony into the room.

"Daddy!" the distinguished young novelist exclaimed, and he seemed positively out of breath, "here's an awful thing happened. Brian's got mixed up in a murder."

"Both of you sit down." Appleby looked with considerably more interest at Mr. Button than at his son. B.B. too was out of breath. But B.B. was also as pale as death. The lad, Appleby said to himself, is clean out of his comfortable academic depth. "And might it be described," Appleby asked aloud, "as a particularly gruesome murder?"

"Moderately," Bobby replied judiciously. "You see—"

"In Oxford?"

"Yes, of course. We've driven straight over. And you've damn well got to come and clear it up."

"But, Bobby, it isn't my business to clear up homicides in Oxford, not even in the interest of B.B. Of course, I can be told about it."

"Well, it seems to have been like this—"

"By B.B. himself, please. It will do him good. So do fetch us drinks, and, Brian, you go ahead."

"Thank you, sir, thank you very much." Mr. Button clearly like being called Brian for a change; it braced him. "Perhaps you know the job I've been given. It's ordering and cataloguing the Cannongate Papers."

"The Third Marquis' stuff?"

"Yes. I'm the Cannongate Lecturer."

"You lecture on the Papers?"

"Of course not." B.B. found this a foolish question. "That's just what I'm called, since I've got to be called something. I get the whole bloody archive in order, and then it's to be edited

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and published in a grand way, and I shall be Number Two on the job. Quite a thing for me."

"I'm delighted to hear it. Go on."

"All Lord Cannongate's papers have been deposited with the college by the trustees. Masses and masses of them—and some of them as confidential as hell."

"State papers, you mean?"

"Well, yes—but that's not exactly the rub. There's a certain amount of purely personal and family stuff. It hasn't been sieved out. I have to segregate it and lock it up. It has nothing to do with what can ever be published."

"Then the trustees ought to have done that job themselves."

"I couldn't agree more. But they're lazy as hell, so the responsibility has come to me. It's a question of confidence. If there's a leak, what follows is a complete shambles so far as my career's concerned."

"I see." Appleby looked with sympathy at this agitated young man. "But something has been said about murder? That sounds rather a different order of thing."

"Yes, of course." B.B. passed a hand across his brow. "A sense of proportion, and all that. I must try to get it right." B.B. took a big breath and began to tell his story.

He worked, it seemed, in a kind of commodious dungeon beneath the college library. The cavernous chamber was impregnable; so, within it, were the numerous steel file cabinets in which the Cannongate Papers had arrived. B.B., coming and going, had only to deal faithfully with locks and keys, and nothing could go wrong.

Unfortunately it is not easy, living in a residential university, to bear constantly in mind that the world is inhabited by others as well as scholars and gentlemen, ancient faithful menservants of a quasi-hereditary sort, a few pretty secretaries, and an excellent chef. One may differ sharply from one's colleagues over such issues as the problem of the historical Socrates; one may even be conscious that at times quite naked and shocking animosities can generate themselves out of less learned matters—as, for example, where to hang a picture or who shall look after the wine; but one doesn't—one simply doesn't—expect to have one's pocket picked or one's researchers plagiarized.

The concept of the felonious, in short, is one to which it is difficult to give serious thought.

These considerations—or something like them—B.B. did

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divulge as the early stages of his narrative now unfolded. He had not always been too careful about those bloody keys, and he would look a pretty fool in a witness box if this ghastly affair had the consequence of depositing him in one before a judge and jury.

Appleby's benevolent reception of the troubles of Bobby's friend didn't stand up to all this too well. He had a simple professional persuasion that keys exist to be turned in locks without fail at appropriate times, and that a young man who has gone vague on instructions he has received and accepted in such a matter ought not to be let off being told that he has been improperly negligent. On the other hand, it was possible that B.B. was himself feeling very bad indeed. These were considerations that required balanced utterance.

"I hope," Appleby said, "that we needn't conclude your culpable carelessness over these things to have been the direct occasion of somebody's getting murdered. It sounds inherently improbable. But go on."

"Well, sir, there's rather a difficult one there." B.B. was recovering from the extreme disarray in which he had arrived at Dream. "I suppose the original chunk of dirty work—a bit of thieving—couldn't have happened if I'd always been right on the ball over those rotten keys. But the murder's a different matter. That seems to have been the result of my having, as a matter of fact, a brighter moment."

"Brian saw the significance of the electricity." Bobby Appleby, who had returned to his father's study deftly carrying a decanter, three glasses, and a plate of chocolate biscuits, offered this luminous remark. "Absolutely top-detective stuff, if you ask me."

"But I don't ask you. So just pour us that sherry and be quiet." Appleby turned back to Mr. Button. "More about your brighter moment, please."

"When I happen on any paper dealing with a certain delicate and purely family matter, I have instructions to photocopy it. There's some prospect of a law suit, it seems, over whether a grandson of *my* Lord Cannongate was of legitimate birth or not, and a sort of dossier has to be got together for some solicitors."

"You have to make only one copy?"

"Yes, and when I came on something relevant earlier this week I did just that. We have a machine on which we can do the job ourselves, you see, in one of the college offices. There

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were eight pages of the stuff, and when I'd made a copy I filed the eight sheets of it away in a special box with other photocopies of similar material. That was on Monday. Yesterday morning I had to go to that box again, and I happened to turn over those particular copies. Only, the sheets were pretty well stuck to each other still. So you see."

"No, Brian, I *don't* see." Appleby glanced from the Cannongate Lecturer to the creator of *The Lumber Room*, who was punishing the chocolate biscuits rather more heavily than the sherry. He might have been wondering whether England was exclusively populated by excessively clever young men. "Why should they be stuck to each other?"

"Because of what Bobby says—the electricity." B.B. seemed surprised that this had not been immediately apparent. "Those photocopying machines are uncommonly lavish with it. Static electricity, I think it's called. If you stack your copies one on top of another as they come out of the contraption, they cling to one another like—"

"Like characters in a skin flick." Bobby had momentarily stopped munching to offer this helpful simile. "And that's what Brian found."

"I see." Appleby was no longer mystified. "The electrical phenomenon fades, and therefore the sheets manifesting it yesterday could not be those which you had filed away on Monday. Earlier yesterday, or just a little before that, somebody had extracted your copies from their box, photocopied them in turn, and then—inadvertently, perhaps—returned to the box not the older copies but the newer ones. And but for this curious electrical or magnetic effect on the paper, and but for your being alert enough to notice it and draw the necessary inference, nobody would ever have known there had been any monkey business at all."

"That's it, sir. And, if I may say so, pretty hot of you to get there in one."

"Thank you very much," Appleby said a shade grimly. "It doesn't exactly tax the intellect. And just what did you do, Brian, when you made this unfortunate discovery?"

"I went straight to our Master, Robert Durham, and told him the whole thing. There was nothing else for it but to confess to the head man."

"That was thoroughly sensible of you." Appleby spoke as a man mollified. "And how has the Master taken it?"

"How *did* he take it," Bobby

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corrected, and reached for another biscuit.

"*What?*" Appleby looked from one to the other young man aghast. "Brian—?"

"Yes, sir. You see, the Master seemed to have ideas about what had happened, although he didn't tell me what they were. It appeared to ring a bell. And that must be why they've murdered him."

"Good God!" Appleby had a passing acquaintance with the scholar thus summarily disposed of.

"We could have better spared a better man." Bobby offered this improving quotation with some solemnity. "Of course, the old boy had had his life. I did feel that. He must have been sixty, if he was a day. He'd toasted his bottom before the fire of life. It sank—"

"Possibly so." Appleby made no attempt to find this out-of-turn mortuary humor diverting, but he did perhaps judge it, from Bobby, a shade mysterious.

"Still," Bobby went on, "even if the Master was a clever case for euthanasia, the thing must be cleared up. *You* must come and clear it up, as I've said. The fact is, they may be getting round to imagining things."

"Who do you mean by 'they'? B.B. seems to be applying the word to a gang of assassins."

"What *I* mean is the police." Bobby Appleby was suddenly speaking slowly and carefully. "They may pitch on some quite unsuitable suspect. For instance, on B.B. himself. You see, there are one or two things you haven't yet heard."

"To my confusion, Bobby means." Mr. Button, who had cheered up while reporting his acumen over the electrified photocopies, was again sunk in gloom, and he had blurted this out after a short expressive silence. "I think the police believe I took the Master a cock-and-bull story, just as a coverup for something else. I think they believe the Master spotted my deception, and that I killed him because otherwise I'd have been turfed out in disgrace and it would have been the end of me."

"That's a succinct statement, at least." Appleby was looking at his son's friend gravely. "Does it mean that, in addition to being careless with those keys, you had been at fault in some other way as well?"

"I'm afraid it does. You see, I'd had the idea of writing a few popular articles on the side."

"My dear young man! You were going to publicize this Cannongate family scandal you've been talking about?"

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"Of course not!" B.B. had flushed darkly. "Just some purely political things. I'd have got permission, and all that, from the trustees. But I felt I wanted to have a definite proposal to put to them. So I had a newspaper chap up from London several times and showed him this and that. It was a bit irregular, I suppose. It could have looked bad. As a matter of fact, our senior History Tutor came on us a couple of times and didn't seem to like it. I expect he has told the pigs."

"As it had undoubtedly now become his duty to do." Appleby wasn't pleased by this manner of referring to the police. "But this London contact of yours could at least substantiate your comparatively blameless intentions?"

"I suppose so."

"On the other hand, if this journalist is an unscrupulous person, might he have come back into the college and done this thieving and copying himself? Had you told him about those more intimate papers? Even shown them to him?"

"Not shown them. And only mentioned them in a general way. A bit of talk over a pint. He may have gathered where they were kept."

"Could he, a stranger, have got at the photocopying machine?"

"Well, yes, in theory. I took him in there and copied something trivial for him—just to show him we're quite up to date. It's all a bit unfortunate."

"I agree. And is there anything else that's unfortunate? For example, have you done any other indiscreet talking about this scandal part in the Cannongate Papers?"

"No, of course not. Or only to Bruno."

"Very well, B.B. Tell me about Bruno."

"Bruno Bone is our English Tutor, although he's pretty well just a contemporary of Bobby and me. Teaches Wordsworth and Coleridge and all that sort of stuff. But, really, he wants to be a novelist. More junk yards, so to speak." This impertinent glance at Bobby's masterpiece was accompanied by rather a joyless laugh on B.B.'s part. "I told Bruno one evening that there was a whole novel in those damned private papers."

"That was sheer nonsense, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid so. You know how it is, late at night and after some drinks. Talking for effect, and all that."

"But at least your brilliant conversation informed Mr. Bone that these scandalous

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papers do exist? Did he take any further interest in them?"

"Well, yes. Bruno came in one morning and asked to have a dekko. He was a bit miffed when I told him it couldn't be done."

"Just how did you tell him?"

"Oh, I slapped the relevant box and said, 'Not for you, my boy.'"

"I see." Appleby gazed in some fascination at this unbelievably luckless youth. "Tell me, B.B. Of course there isn't the material for a novel in your wretched dossier. But might there be material for blackmail?"

"Definitely, I'd say. It's not all exactly past history, you know. There are people still alive—"

"All right, we needn't go into details yet. But tell me this: might the Master have got to know about your chatter to Bruno Bone?"

"It's not unlikely. Bruno's an idiot. Talks about anything to anybody."

"That's a habit I'm glad you disapprove of. Do you think Bruno could have developed some morbid and irrational curiosity as a result of all this, and have actually abstracted that particular bunch of papers and made copies of them?"

"I suppose it's possible. Those literary characters are wildly neurotic."

"And the Master might have found out—with the result that Bruno's own career would suddenly have been very much at risk?"

"Yes. The Master is—was—rather a dab at nosing things out."

"And that brings us to the last relevant point at the moment. Just how did Dr. Durham die?"

"Brains blown out." Bobby Appleby, who had finished the last chocolate biscuit, produced this robustly. "With some sort of revolver, it seems. Not something that Brian's likely to keep handy, I'd have thought."

"Nor Bruno," B.B. said handsomely.

"Nor any stray blackmailer, either." Appleby was frowning. "You wouldn't know whether the police are claiming to have found the weapon?"

"Oh, yes." Bobby nodded vigorously. "It was lying on the carpet in the Master's study."

"That's where I'd expect it to be." Appleby sounded faintly puzzled. "You know, the great majority of men who are found with their brains blown out have effected the messy job themselves. And even in the moment of death some spasm or convulsion can result in the weapon's landing yards

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away. So, just for the moment, this story of yours sounds to me something of a mare's nest. Robert Durham is in some pathological state of depression and suddenly makes away with himself. And then in comes Brian's bad conscience about his handling of his archive. Bobby, wouldn't you agree? You've said something that makes me think you would."

"Have I?" Bobby seemed not to make much of this. "Durham wasn't *my* Master, you know. He got the job only when mine died a couple of years ago. But I've seen enough of him to know that he was a rum bird."

"Secretive," B.B. added. "Nobody quite knew what he was up to. He was a bit remote. Brooding type. And a sick man, some said."

"God bless my soul!" As he made use of this antique expression, Sir John Appleby got to his feet. "Unless you're both leading me up the garden path, you're describing a thoroughly persuasive candidate for suicide. Not that such don't get murdered from time to time. They may ingeniously elect liquidation in one way or another, without so much as being conscious of the fact. Which is psychologically interesting, no doubt, but murder it nevertheless remains."

Appleby paused, and looked searchingly from one young man to the other. "Is there anything else I ought to know?"

"Not in the way of fact, I'd say." For the moment Bobby Appleby, so childishly addicted to chocolate biscuits, appeared to have taken charge of things. "Of course, the people who may have extra facts are the police. And they *do* have something. I don't know what, but I know it's there. I was present when they talked to Brian early this morning. They kept mum, but I knew they had *something.*" Bobby grinned at his father. "Family instinct, perhaps. It's why I brought Brian over to Dream. You *can* take a hand?"

"I can stroll around the college and have a chat here and there. I'd tell the Chief Constable and he wouldn't mind a bit—always provided I was tactful with his men on the spot. And being *that* is one of the things I keep a grip on even in senescence."

Appleby, as he momentarily adopted this humorous vein, let his glance stray out the window. It fixed itself briefly, and then returned to the two young men. "I'll make a call or two," he said easily, and moved toward the door. "Drink up the sherry meanwhile—there's

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about a thimbleful left for each of you."

With this Appleby left the room. But he was back before much in the way of telephone calls could have been achieved.

"We were talking about the police," he said gently. "As a matter of fact, they're here; and, Brian, they very probably have a warrant for your arrest."

"The personalities of the people concerned?" The Vice-Master, who was called Fordyce, looked at Appleby doubtfully. "That's not what the local police are asking. They want to know who had keys to what, and when who could have been where."

"Quite right. Absolutely essential." Appleby nodded approvingly. "It's what gets the results in nine cases out of ten. And, on this occasion, they appear to have got a result quite rapidly. Too rapidly, I think you'd say?"

"Of course I'd say. The notion of that young man Brian Button providing himself with a revolver and shooting the Master dead with it in his own study is simply too fantastic to stand up."

"But just at the moment, Vice-Master, it seems to be standing up rather well. The police have no doubt about what Dr. Durham was doing when he was shot, and it's what they've discovered that has led them to question our young man. Durham was dictating a letter on his tape recorder for his secretary to type out later. It was to the Cannongate trustees and said flatly that Button had been guilty of professional misconduct of so scandalous a sort that he must be dismissed at once—even though it meant that all academic employment would henceforth be closed to him."

"It was a very strange thing for the Master to write, Sir John."

"Well, there it is. The tape isn't to be denied. The Master appears to have flicked the switch that stops the machine simply because he was interrupted while on the job. So the record remained for the police to find."

"I understand the police case. Button has admitted going to see the Master early yesterday morning and telling him a story about rifled papers. It is not supposed that he returned again in the late afternoon, armed and resolved. The Master told him of the step he proposed to take, but without saying that he had at that moment broken off from recording his letter. So Button killed him, hoping thus to smother up the whole thing. I

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repeat that it is utter nonsense, completely alien to Brian Button's character, such as it is. A somewhat irresponsible young man, perhaps. But not precisely bloody, bold, and resolute."

"It's Durham's character that interests me more. And aren't you saying that he too seems to have behaved *out* of character?"

"In a sense that is so." Fordyce had taken this point soberly. "But perhaps I have to say that, although I knew Robert Durham long before he became Master, I never quite understood the man. I have sometimes thought of him as harboring that degree of inner instability which is liable to produce what they call a personality change. And yet that is a fantastic speculation."

"At least a change of job, one supposes, may bring out something roughly of that sort. Was there any particular regard in which he appeared to you to be changing?"

"I can scarcely answer that without appearing very much at sea, Sir John. In one aspect Durham was a man growing detached, remote, fatigued. In another he was becoming irascible, authoritarian, and increasingly prone to flashes of odd behavior. He could behave like an old-fashioned headmaster with a vindictive turn of mind."

"Dear me! That sort of thing surely doesn't cut much ice with undergraduates today?"

"Decidedly not. They can be a very great nuisance, our young men. But it is reason alone that is of any avail with them. It's something they have begun to get the hang of a little. Talk sense patiently enough and without condescension, and round they always come." Fordyce had delivered this high doctrine with an effect of sudden intellectual conviction. "Durham had lost grip on that."

"How did he get along with the younger dons?"

"Ah! Not too well."

"To the extent of anything like a feud? With Button himself, for instance?"

"With Button, I'd scarcely suppose so, although the lad may have annoyed him. Nor with any of them to what you might call a point of naked animosity. Bone might be an exception."

"Bone? A young man called Bruno Bone?"

"Yes. I'm not sure that Bone, for whatever reason, hadn't got to the point of hating Durham's guts." It was rather unexpectedly that the Vice-Master had produced this strong expression.

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"But Bone, too, would scarcely be bloody, bold, and resolute?"

"Of course not. He—" the Vice-Master, who seemed to have produced this reply by rote, suddenly checked himself. "Do you know," he said, "that I wouldn't be quite confident of that? But then I'm beginning to wonder what I shall ever be robustly confident about again. This is an undermining affair, Sir John."

Bruno Bone, a lanky, prematurely bald young man, was spending his Saturday afternoon banging away on his typewriter. Perhaps he was writing a lecture, or perhaps he was writing a novel. Whichever it was, he didn't seem to care much for being interrupted by the mere father of the author of *The Lumber Room*.

"Yes, of course I know they've arrested Button," Bone said. "So what?"

"I'd rather suppose you might be distressed or concerned. Not that they have, perhaps, quite arrested him. He's helping them with their inquiries. They have to tread carefully, you know. But it's true they hold a document from a magistrate. It's in reserve. But I'd simply like to ask, Mr. Bone, what you think of the affair."

"Absolute poppycock. Brian Button's an irresponsible idiot, and I wouldn't trust him with looking after the beer in the buttery, let alone those Cannongate Papers. But he wouldn't shoot old bloody Durham. Wouldn't have the nerve."

"Would you?"

"If you weren't old enough to be my father I'd tell you that was a damned impertinent question."

"Never mind the impertinence. Would you?"

"I don't know that I know." Bruno Bone was of a sudden entirely amenable. "It's an interesting speculation. On the whole, I'm ashamed to say, I guess not."

"Or would anybody else in the college?"

"Can't think of anybody."

"Then I'm left—so far as anybody who has been put a name to—with a London journalist whom Button sent for and talked to a shade rashly. There are journalists, I suppose, who are capable of anything."

"This one may have scented a hopeful whiff of blackmail, or something of that kind? And the Master may have got onto what he was up to and had his brains blown out for his pains? I wouldn't like to have to render such a course of events plausible in a novel."

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"If you ever try I'll hope to read your attempt at it." Appleby gave this quite a handsome sound. "When did you last see Dr. Durham?"

"When did I last see my father?" Bruno Bone was amused. "Quite late in the day, really. I'm not a bad suspect, come to think of it. Smart of you to be chasing me up, Sir John. Quite Bobby's father, if I may say so. Bobby's bright."

"I never judged him exactly dim, but the point's not of the first relevance. Be more precise, please."

"Very well. I went to see the old brute about an hour before he was indubitably dead. Probably the last man in, so to speak. A breathless hush in the close, and all that. I wanted to sound him out about the prospects of my touching the college for a travel grant. California. Awful universities, but a marvelous climate. Durham treated me as if I was a ghost. Bizarre, wouldn't you say? Considering he was so well on the way to becoming one himself."

"No doubt. What was the Master doing?"

"Concocting a letter."

"On some sort of dictaphone?"

"Nothing of the sort. Laborious pen and ink. And putting a lot of concentration into it, I'd say. He made a civil pretense of listening to me for about thirty seconds, then turfed me out. He was back on his job before I'd reached the door."

"And that was the last you saw of him?"

"No, it wasn't." Bruno Bone was sardonically triumphant. "And here's where I get off the hook. I saw him ten minutes later—and so must plenty of other people—crossing the great quadrangle with his letter in his hand. He went out through the main gate, crossed the road to the post office, shoved his letter into the box, and came back."

"There would be nothing particularly out of the way, would there, about all that?"

"Of course there would. He had only to leave the thing on a table in his hall and it would have been collected by a college messenger."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Bone. And I apologize for disturbing you."

Appleby's final call was on the senior History Tutor, an elderly man called Farnaby, who, he supposed, was in some vague and informal fashion Brian Button's boss.

"One of Button's indiscretions," Appleby said, "appears to have been dreaming up some popular articles based on the documents in his charge and

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calling in a man from some paper or other with whom to discuss the matter. Would you term his doing that a grave breach of confidence?"

"Certainly not. Button ought, no doubt, to have mentioned the matter to the Master or to myself in the first instance. It might even be said that there was a slight element of discourtesy in his conduct of the matter; and anything of the kind is, of course, greatly to be deprecated in a society like ours."

"Of course."

"But let us simply call it an error of judgment. Button has the makings of a competent scholar, but of what may be called *practical* judgment he has very little sense."

"I see. Would you say, Mr. Farnaby, that the young man's lack of practical judgment might extend to his supposing it judicious to murder Dr. Durham?"

"Of course not. I am almost inclined, Sir John, to say that the question could be asked only in a frivolous spirit. It is utter nonsense."

"So everybody appears to feel—except the police. Might Button be described as a protégé of yours?"

"I don't think we go in for protégés." Farnaby had frowned. "But I certainly feel in some degree responsible for him. He was my pupil, and it was I who recommended him for his present employment."

"Thank you. Now, it appears to me, Mr. Farnaby, that we have at present just one hard fact in this affair. The day before yesterday, or thereabout, some person unknown abstracted eight sheets from a file of photocopies, copied those photocopies anew, and then returned the newer and not the older photocopies to the file. The switch was almost certainly accidental rather than intentional. It could not have been designed to attract Button's attention, since there was no particular likelihood of his turning over those particular papers again before the static electricity had faded from them. At this specific point, then, we have no reason to suspect any sort of plot against the young man."

"Clearly not."

"Button went to the Master and told his story. The Master—if Button is to be believed, and if he didn't form a false impression—the Master responded to the story as if he had some inkling of what lay behind it. 'It rang a bell.' That is Button's phrase for it. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Nothing whatever, I fear."

"I suppose everybody would

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have learned almost at once about Button's cleverness in tumbling to the implications of that small electrical phenomenon?"

"Almost certainly. He's a young man who can't help chattering."

"Do you think that his chatterbox quality, and perhaps other forms of tiresomeness, may have been irritating the Master in a manner, or to a degree, Button himself wasn't aware of?"

"I'm afraid it is only too probable. Poor Durham was becoming rather intolerant of folly."

"That seems to be a view generally held, and it brings me to my last point. The Vice-Master has given me some impressions of Durham as a man. And he judges it rather odd, for one thing, that Durham should have thought to dictate a letter to the Cannongate trustees that could only have resulted in Button's being sacked. But again—and rather contradictorily—he represents Durham as increasingly irascible, indeed vindictive. How would you yourself describe the man?"

"He owned a certain complexity of character, I suppose. Sit beside him at dinner and you might judge him rather a dull, even a morose man, particularly during his recent ill health. But in solitude and at his desk he must have become something quite different, since his writing was often brilliantly witty—and maliciously witty, it may be added; whereas in all his college relations his sense of the academic proprieties extended almost to the rectitudinous."

Farnaby paused, and seemed to become aware of this speech as a shade on the heavy side. "In fact," he went on, "poor Robert Durham, barring occasional acts of almost alarming eccentricity, was a bit of a bore. But it would have been a safe bet that the memoirs he was working on would have been highly entertaining. You will recall that he was in political life as a younger man and knew everybody there was to know then. It was probably because he found Oxford a bit of a bore that *we* found *him* one. But I must not speak uncharitably. A horrifying mystery like this is a chastening thing."

"It is, no doubt, horrifying." Appleby stood up. "Or, if not horrifying, at least distressing. Whether it is a mystery is another matter. We can only wait and see."

"Wait and see, Sir John! I very much hope that the most active steps are being taken to clear the matter up."

"In a sense, perhaps they

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are. A little patience is what is required, all the same."

"And my unfortunate young colleague has to set us an example in the matter?" Farnaby spoke with asperity. "Button has to rest content in his cell?"

"I think not. It is improbable that any definitive step has been taken in regard to him. Perhaps I can make myself useful—in this way if in no other, my dear sir—by persuading my former colleagues to part with him. In fact, I'll take him back to Dream with me. He and Bobby can play tennis."

"And for how long will they be able to do *that?*" Although he uttered this question challengingly, Farnaby was clearly much relieved.

"Oh, until Monday morning. It's my guess that between breakfast and lunch on that day Dr. Durham's demise will effectively clear itself up."

And it was at ten o'clock on Monday that Appleby strolled out to the tennis court. A police car had arrived at Dream and departed again, and Appleby now had some papers in his hand.

"Relax," he said to the two young men. "Your late Master willfully sought his own salvation. Or that's how the First Grave Digger would put it. *Felo de se.* Suicide. The letter has arrived, and all is now clear."

"The letter?" Brian Button repeated. "The one he was dictating—"

"No, no, B.B. Have some sense, my dear boy. The one your friend Bruno saw him writing and that he took over to the post office himself. Stamped, of course, as second-class mail."

"I don't understand you, sir." B.B. had sat down on a garden seat; he was almost as pale as when he had first arrived at Dream.

"And I'm blessed if I do either." Bobby Appleby chucked his tennis racket on the grass at his feet. "Explain, for goodness' sake."

"Come, come, where's all that absolutely top-detective stuff?" Appleby was in irritatingly good humor. "And, Bobby, you had an instinct it was all a matter of Durham's calling it a day: don't you remember your prattle about the fire of life, and euthanasia, and whatever? As for the letter, it stared us in the face. The Master didn't want it to go out of his lodging through the college messenger service, so he took it to the post office himself."

"He was anxious," B.B. demanded, "to conceal whom he was writing to?"

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"Not exactly that. *The letter was to somebody in the college.* And he didn't want to risk its being delivered, after his death, straight away by hand. Dispatched by second-class mail it would be delivered this morning. And it was. To the Vice-Master."

"And just what was this in aid of?" It was clear from his tone that Brian Button already dimly knew.

"It was in aid, my dear lad, of what his seemingly interrupted communication to the Cannongate trustees on that tape recorder was also in aid of. Something quite extravagantly malevolent. For let's face it, B.B. You had annoyed him. You had annoyed him quite a lot. And he was maliciously resolved to make his departure from this life the occasion of your experiencing *un mauvais quart d'heure.* Or rather more."

"He thought it was really me who had done that monkeying with the photocopies?"

"No, B.B. He couldn't have thought that. For the Master had done that second copying himself. Incidentally, the photocopying machine has been in use this morning. By the police. And they've sent me this."

Appleby handed a paper to B.B. "From the Master to the Vice-Master. Robert Durham's testament, poor chap."

My dear Adrian,

First, let me say how much I hope that the Fellows will elect you into the Mastership. If it should come about that I am permitted to look down upon the college from on high, or obliged to peer up at it from below, this will be the spectacle I shall most wish to view. Bless you, my dear man.

Secondly, pray have the police release that wretched Button. (Is not this appropriately reminiscent of some of the last words of Shakespeare's Lear?) If he be not in custody as you read this, it is because they have been so stupid and negligent as to neglect the tape recorder on my desk. But surely not even Dogberry and Verges could be so dull.

Button needs a lesson in (as we used to say) pulling his socks up. He is also (what, most illogically, I cannot quite forgive him) the immediate occasion of the step I am to take. The Cannongate Papers contain some fascinating things, and the censurable carelessness of this young man prompted me to help myself in a clandestine fashion to certain material useful to—shall I say?—a historian of the intimate *mores* of the more elevated classes of society at least not very long ago. Unfortunately the tiresome Button is very

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acute; he detected the theft and came to tell me about it with a mingling of trepidation, uneasiness, complacency, and self-congratulation which has extremely offended me.

I need not speak of my present state of health. What has told me that the time has come is really, and precisely, this Button business. He hasn't found me out but *I* have found *myself* out. And in an action of the weirdest eccentricity! As that equally tiresome Bruno Bone would tell you, the poet Pope speaks of Heads of Houses who beastly Skelton quote. But who ever heard of a Head of a House given to petty nocturnal pilferings?

Ave, Hadriane, morituri te salutat.

ROBERT DURHAM, Master

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THE HAUNTED MAN

by HENRY SLESAR

Gannet knew that Kitty would want him to look his best at dinner, so he wore his blue serge suit, a shirt with a white collar and broad red stripes (not too flashy), a conservative gray tie, and no gun.

The last sartorial decision was the toughest he had to make. But it couldn't be helped; he no longer had suits tailored to accommodate the bulge of a shoulder holster. That hadn't mattered for the past week; he had worn one anyway. On the day he saw the terrifying apparition in the apartment house elevator he had dug up the Smith & Wesson .38 that had lain idle in his bedroom closet for almost four years. He thought he was done with the need for armor; the padrones had quietly approved his retirement at the age of 60; he had left no enemies behind (except those in their expensive coffins); and proper businessmen didn't carry pieces, they carried attaché cases.

He looked the part when he left the duplex on East Sixty-third Street. His pewter-colored hair neatly brushed, his slight paunch softening the still-muscular slope of his neck and shoulders, Gannet looked like the executive the world believed him to be (Kitty mostly; but then, Kitty *was* his world). But he was jumpy. When he pushed the elevator button he held his breath until the door slid open and he saw that the car was unoccupied.

Kitty Russo's place was on the west side, a couple of big

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drab rooms that her twenty-three-year-old enthusiasm had converted into page 56 of *House & Garden*. It was a co-op, and Gannet had bought it for her, as a college graduation present. She had refused it at first. He said it was for her father; that if Joe Russo hadn't been so dumb about life insurance he would have left her the kind of money it took to buy the place.

Kitty had cried a lot, and Gannet had cried a little, and in the end she had thrown her arms around him and thanked him and called him Uncle Marty the way she used to when she was a kid, not a college graduate with a job, her own apartment, and, now, a serious boy friend.

"Dr. Ira Hammel," Kitty said, introducing him, with a little proud emphasis on the "doctor."

Hammel looked too young to be a physician. He was good-looking but too plump in the center for Gannet to think of him as mature. But he shook Hammel's hand and smiled and refused his offer of a drink.

"Booze and me don't get along," Gannet said cheerfully.

"I told Ira about your colitis," Kitty said.

"Oh, oh," Gannet chuckled, "here comes the bill, right?"

"Does it still bother you?" the doctor said. "Kitty says you had it pretty bad a couple of years back, but you seem to have it licked now. Low-residue diet, I suppose?"

"Hey, what is this? I came here for dinner, not an examination!"

"Right!" Kitty laughed. "One low-residue dinner coming up."

It wasn't bad. Kitty kept the menu simple, so she didn't make any big mistakes. The doctor-boy friend was quiet, respectful; obviously Kitty had filled him in on the second-father role that Gannet played in her life. And Gannet didn't stay late, which they both obviously appreciated.

But when he emerged from the apartment building into the misty rain that was slicking down the sidewalks of West End Avenue he saw another one of *them*.

The man was wearing a raincoat, as if he had anticipated the weather that the forecasters hadn't predicted. He wore a felt hat pulled well over his eyes. He stood on the corner as if waiting to signal a cab, but his hands were thrust deep into his pockets.

Then he turned, and Gannet saw that he had no mouth.

His frightened reaction was audible, but the man simply stared at him relentlessly.

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Gannet whirled, running back toward Kitty's apartment house door. He didn't know if the man without a mouth was following him, but it didn't matter; he made a frantic effort to open the door, then realized it was locked.

He fumbled for the button that would sound a signal in the apartment upstairs, but by the time he found it his panic had subsided. Nobody had followed him. The man without a mouth was no longer in sight.

He went home and debated whether to break his year-long abstinence and have a drink. Even the fact that he was considering it shook him badly.

"Cracking up," he said to himself. "If I'm seeing things *without* drinking, who knows what the booze will do?"

The phone rang at 11:30, and it was Kitty.

"Well, what did you think?"

"Of the boy friend? He's okay. Doesn't talk much, does he?"

Kitty laughed. "You had him awed. I told him what a big shot you were—all those shoe-repair stores you own. I told him, 'Wait until you see his duplex tomorrow'."

"Tomorrow?" Gannet said. "We make a date for you to come here tomorrow?"

"I'm making it now," Kitty said. "He wants to do this right, Uncle Marty. I told him you were the only family I had, and he's got this old-fashioned thing about it."

"What old-fashioned thing?"

Kitty giggled. "He's going to ask you for my hand in marriage. I'm just calling to make sure you give him the right answer. A simple 'Yes, my boy,' will do. Is that understood?" When he didn't reply, she said soberly, "Uncle Marty, are you okay? I didn't poison your colon or something tonight?"

"I'm fine," Gannet said. "A little surprised, maybe. Boy friend, okay. But marriage?"

"Would you rather we just lived together? It's the Now thing, you know."

"Never mind that Now stuff!" Gannet growled, which seemed to please Kitty. It's exactly what her father would have said, Gannet realized, and he remembered with a feeling deeper than sadness how much the girl had adored Joe Russo.

Kitty said, "No food," so all Gannet prepared for their visit the next evening was a wheel-shaped tray of hors d'oeuvres that cost $60, thanks mainly to the preponderance of caviar. He also ordered whiskey. When the doorbell rang at 6:30 he thought it was the kid from the liquor store, but it was a tall silent man who had no mouth.

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Gannet dropped the wallet he was holding and began to scream. His vision blurred, or maybe the figure itself evaporated back into the mysterious limbo from which it had come; but by the time he came to his senses there was nobody in the doorway, and Kitty's new boy friend was poking him all over, and Kitty herself seemed to be crying a hundred miles away.

"It's all right," Ira Hammel said. "It's not his heart. He's had some kind of shock, but he's coming out of it."

Gannet was thinking: the kid sounds like a doctor now, he even *looks* older. But then Gannet was himself again, which meant that he blustered out half a dozen excuses for what had happened, none of which seemed to convince Hammel or satisfy Kitty.

"All right," Gannet said finally. "I'll tell you what it was, but you've got to promise not to send for the men in the white coats. Is it a deal?"

Then he told them about the first man in the elevator.

"He wasn't a big guy. About my height, not so meaty. He was wearing a gray suit, ordinary. He was in the corner of the elevator, reading a newspaper. He didn't even look up when I got into the car. But then I turned around and saw him looking at me. Don't ask me about his eyes or his nose. I don't remember anything that he *did* have, only what he *didn't*."

"What do you mean?" Kitty said.

"I mean he didn't have any mouth. Nothing there at all. Just skin covering everything from nose to chin. It was something to see—something I didn't want to see again."

"A deformity," Hammel suggested.

Kitty said, "Could there *be* such a thing, Ira?"

"I suppose," the doctor shrugged. "I'll have to look it up in my *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine.*"

"Wait. Listen," Gannet said. "I saw it again—I mean in the elevator—a man without a mouth. The next day."

"He probably lives in the building," Kitty said.

"No. You don't get it. It was the same thing all over again, no mouth, nothing. *Only it wasn't the same man!*"

Hammel looked at the girl, and Gannet knew what the unspoken message was. But he went on.

"I saw another one yesterday, when I came over to your place for dinner. Going home, on the corner, a man in a raincoat, hailing a cab, I guess. He turned around and so help me God he didn't have a

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mouth, Kitty! Don't tell me it was the same guy, because it wasn't. He was somebody else, but no mouth."

Hammel asked the obvious question.

"Yeah," Gannet answered. "That's right. Just before you two got here. I ordered some stuff from the liquor store—I don't keep any booze in the place since I stopped drinking—and I thought it was the kid making the delivery. But it was another one of *them*."

"A man without a mouth."

"Yeah."

"Oh, Uncle Marty," Kitty said unhappily. "You must have been seeing things, that's all. Maybe you're working too hard. Maybe there's something wrong with your vision, some kind of blind spot in your eyes." She turned to Hammel hopefully. "Couldn't that be it, Ira? Just a spot in his eyes that blurs his vision?"

"Could be," he said, his tone noncommittal.

"It just got to me," Gannet said. "You understand? Once, twice, I could chalk it off. To fatigue. Old age."

"You're not old!" the girl said.

"But I'm not tired, either," Gannet said. "Working too hard? I put in two, three hours a day at most. Other times I'm just hanging around, visiting the track, stuff like that. No, it's something else. Freaks walking around. Martians maybe. Hey, you think it's Martians, Doc?" He gave him a feeble smile.

"Why pick on you?" Hammel said.

"Yeah," Gannet nodded. "That's right. I never had anything to do with Martians, so why pick on me?" He looked at the young doctor gravely. "What you really want to say, Doc, is that the trouble is up here." He touched his head.

Ira Hammel smiled.

"Eye, ear, nose, and throat," he said. "That's all I know about, Mr. Gannet."

They never got around to the main event of the evening: marriage talk. But Hammel, unaccompanied by Kitty, came around the following day. He had phoned an hour earlier, and Gannet had agreed to see him; but by the time he arrived, Gannet seemed to have changed his mind. He opened the door only the space of four inches, and said, "Look, Doc, do you mind if we talk later? I'm not feeling so hot this afternoon. I got a headache."

"Maybe I can help."

"Sure you can help—by being a nice boy and going away."

"I won't stay long. I just wanted to talk to you for a while."

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"About marriage?" Gannet said. "Look, you don't need my blessing, just treat my little girl right."

"Not about marriage," Hammel said gravely. "About you. And the Syndicate."

Gannet's hold on the door loosened. The young doctor took advantage of it and gave it the slightest push, enough to give Gannet a view of his sober expression. Then he was inside, and Gannet was telling him to sit down. There was a hard edge to Gannet's voice, but it didn't scare Hammel. Gannet decided Kitty's boy friend wasn't as soft as he looked.

"Okay," Gannet said. "What do you know about me?"

"I know you were called up before the State Crime Commission back in the 'fifties."

"You weren't old enough to blow your own nose back in the 'fifties."

"That's right. I remember only what I've read in the magazines or seen in television documentaries. But this man I saw yesterday, this psychiatrist, he was just getting his medical degree during the hearings, and he remembered all about it. He remembered you, too."

"Psychiatrist?" Gannet said. "You were talking to a shrink about me?"

"Kitty asked me to," Hammel said. "I figured it wouldn't hurt to get an opinion. This psychiatrist wasn't much help as far as making any kind of diagnosis—he said he wouldn't even try with such slim evidence. But when I mentioned your name—well, he remembered the rumors about your involvement with the mob. If I'm talking out of turn, tell me to shut up."

"Shut up," Gannet growled. Then he went to the front door and opened it. "Now get out of here and stop worrying about things that aren't any of your business. And you better not say one word of this bull to Kitty, or I'll *really* be a Papa to her and tell her that her boy friend stinks. Who knows? She might even turn you down, buster, and you can find yourself another girl."

Hammel looked at him steadily.

"This friend of mine," he said. "This psychiatrist. He said he had an idea about these apparitions you've been seeing. It sounded valid to me." He paused. Gannet knew his price for continuing was a closed door. He cursed, and slammed it shut.

"All right. What did the shrink say?"

"He said there was no doubt they were hallucinations. But the pattern of hallucination was fairly clear, given the patient's

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background. Hope you don't mind me referring to you as the 'patient,' Mr. Gannet."

"I still don't know what you're talking about."

"My friend said that seeing a lot of men without mouths might be an indication of a deep-rooted guilt feeling, pertaining to some symbolic representations. I mean, what does it bring to mind, the idea of a man without a mouth?"

"You tell me, Doc."

"Someone who can't talk," Hammel said. "Isn't that obvious? That a man without a mouth is silenced. Mouthless men tell no tales, my friend said." He hesitated. "Just like dead men."

Anger pumped blood into Gannet's face.

"What the hell kind of talk is that? What the hell are you trying to say, buster? You calling me a murderer?"

"Please," Hammel said softly. "I'm reporting a conversation now, not a personal opinion. You asked me, I'm telling you. This psychiatrist says that your past associations may have left you with strong guilt feelings relating to—well, to informers, or would-be informers. That's not an accusation, it's merely an analysis."

Hammel stood up. "Look, I'm trying to help you. And the only reason I'm trying is because of Kitty. Because I'd jump off the George Washington Bridge if Kitty said, please jump, Ira. Now I'll go away and do exactly what you told me to do—stop worrying about things that aren't any of my business."

He walked to the door and this time opened it himself. Gannet said, "There's something else you don't do. You don't say one blessed word about this to Kitty or I'll wrap your diploma around your neck."

"I wasn't going to tell her," Hammel said.

He went out quickly. Gannet, still angry, thought of something else to tell him and again flung the door open. Hammel had caught a Down elevator, and the doors were closing. But a man had got out on Gannet's floor and was coming toward him.

When Gannet saw the man's face, the blank stare of his eyes, the terrible pink mass of flesh where his mouth should have been, he let out an involuntary howl of fear and slammed the door shut, locked it, bolted it, and whimpered as he tried to keep the specter from entering, certain that he was about to try. But nothing happened.

"Oh, God, God," Gannet whispered. "When does it quit? When?"

That night, damning his

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insides, he took his first drink in a year.

He took a bottle of Scotch into his library and filled half a glass with it.

He sipped it slowly, and evoked phantoms.

Who was the first one? Chaudry, of course. Who could forget the first? Chaudry, who sweated himself half to death before Gannet fired the gun that finished the job. They hadn't even told him what Chaudry had done to inspire their wrath, and Gannet had made a mark for himself by not asking. That was the professional way, they told him, and he had swelled up with pride, and never confessed that he had been afraid to ask what Chaudry had done.

They gave him a reason for killing Vic Santione: Santione was stooling, Santione's big mouth had to be shut with graveyard dirt, and Gannet was the boy to do it. Gannet hadn't done the job too well; Santione died in the hospital, not in the street. But he hadn't talked. One of Gannet's slugs had got him in the throat. Not a precaution: luck. But Gannet was lucky—then, and half a dozen hits later, always lucky. Never booked. Never indicted. He did good clean work.

But had he?

Had he really succeeded in silencing them all? Had he failed to put them away forever, because there *wasn't* any forever? Were there ways for them to come back, ways for them to haunt him?

"Ghosts," he whispered aloud, feeling the effect of the alcohol. . .

He dropped in to see Kitty's doctor-boy friend at his office. He came as a friend, he said, not as a patient, just to check out the business address of the man his Kitty was engaged to marry.

"You got a nice office, Doc," he said.

Hammel said, "Have you seen another one?"

Gannet knew what he meant. He felt the embarrassing sting of tears in his eyes.

"I couldn't take going to a shrink," he told him. "I'm not the type, you know? But you, you got a head on you for stuff like this, I can tell."

"I'm not a psychiatrist," Hammel said.

"You can help me," Gannet said stubbornly. "I got ghosts haunting me, that's how I figure it. I never believed in ghosts before, maybe I have to change my mind."

"I'm not a spiritualist, either."

"I figured two ways," Gannet said. "I could go to a doctor. Or I could go to a

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church and talk to a priest or somebody."

"Both might help," Hammel said carefully. "That's one thing psychiatrists and the church have in common—they know confession is good for the soul."

"What do you mean, confession?"

"It's the root of the problem, isn't it? Guilt feelings build up pressure in the mind. Sometimes the pressure becomes unbearable, then there's some kind of explosion."

"In the brain, you mean."

"You might have been right when you used the word 'ghosts.' The ghosts of the past may be haunting you because you haven't told the truth about them—not to yourself, not to anyone."

Gannet stood up, angry again.

"I knew I was wasting my time," he said, and went to the door.

Hammel stopped him by saying, "Kitty and I are having an engagement party in a week. We'd like you to come, Mr. Gannet."

"I don't like parties," Gannet growled, and left the office.

On the way out of the doctor's building he bumped into a man without a mouth. He almost blacked out at the sight of him, but managed to make it to the nearby hack stand. He was sick in the taxi, dry-retching, to the alarm of the cabbie. He was still sick when he got home.

Then he remembered the tape recorder.

Kitty had bought him the thing for Christmas, and he had lied and said it was just what he wanted. Actually, he hadn't touched it since. It was still nestling in its styrofoam bed, its sample reel of tape untouched by sound.

He took it out of the closet and put it on top of his library desk. He stared at the switches that said, ON, OFF, RECORD, STOP, REWIND, PLAY.

He didn't understand gadgets, but he turned on the power of this one, picked up the small microphone attached, and plugged it into the receptacle labeled MIC.

Then he pressed RECORD and saw the reel begin to turn. That was all there was to it.

But the next step was more difficult.

Into the MIC he said, "My name is Martin Gannet. In 1945—no, '46—I shot and killed a man named Rick Chaudry in North Bergen, New Jersey."

Alarmed at what he had just said aloud, he pushed the button marked STOP.

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Then he played it back.

My name is Martin Gannet. In 1945—no, '46—I shot and killed a man named Rick Chaudry. . .

He closed his eyes.

This was the way, he thought. This was the only way. If the ghosts wanted a confession, this would be it. The only ears that would hear it would be the electronic ones in the guts of this little toy. Then he'd take the tape and seal it in an envelope. He'd put the envelope into his desk, alongside his Smith & Wesson .38, and write on it something like: *To be opened after my death.* Maybe then the ghosts would stop haunting him.

He rewound the tape all the way and started the machine again, placing the microphone close to his dry lips.

"My name is Martin Gannet," he said.

The engagement party was noisy. Kitty seemed to have invited no one but girl friends, and Hammel no one but colleagues. Maybe that accounted for the party's shrillness; they all seemed eager to pair off with each other; maybe another engagement party would stem from this one.

Gannet felt uncomfortably isolated, at least until Kitty herself paid some attention to him. She was fixing things to eat, so she asked him to come into the kitchen.

When she saw him in the bright light, she said, "Uncle Marty, you look *wonderful!* A hundred percent better!"

He grinned. "Feeling pretty good," he said.

"No more—trouble?"

"Nah, that's all over with," he said. "All over and done with. I think you were right, you know, about that little blind spot. I think maybe I need glasses or something, that's all."

"And you haven't seen—anything—for a while?"

"Nothing," he said, and chuckled. Then Dr. Hammel came in, looking for Kitty, and she turned to him happily.

"Ira, isn't it wonderful? Uncle Marty says he's feeling much better. No more of those silly hallucinations!"

She picked up a tray of cheese and crackers and kicked open the swinging door to the swinging party outside. The two men didn't follow her.

Ira looked thoughtfully at Gannet, who said, "Look, I said some things to you, Doc. I hope you can forget them."

"I didn't take any offense."

"Well, that's good, on account of you marrying Kitty, that means you'll be stuck with me, too."

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Hammel said, "Is it true what she said? That you're all right? No more hallucinations?"

"Not a one," Gannet answered. "Maybe they were ghosts from the past, like you said. But they've gone back where they came from." He smiled and dug into his pocket. "Oh, I got a little something for you and Kitty. Engagement present." He handed him the white envelope with its gift certificate. "I figured you knew what you needed more than I did," Gannet said, and heard Hammel whistle at seeing the amount.

Gannet left the apartment half an hour later, enjoying a sense of well-being. The night was clear, so he decided to walk a while before hailing a cab. At a stop light he stood beside a young woman in a light cloth coat. She had a nice, trim figure, and he wasn't too old to admire it. But then she turned—and she had no mouth.

Gannet refused to believe what he was seeing, but she kept on looking at him, and there was no mistake. This time a woman without a mouth.

Gannet made a strangled noise and stepped off the curb without looking. The driver of the sedan braked quickly, but not soon enough.

Kitty was his first visitor at the hospital, of course. She was accompanied by Hammel.

"You're a lucky man, Marty," the doctor said, calling him by his first name for the first time. "You must have good strong bones, because you didn't break one of them."

"I'm okay," Gannet said, his voice unconvincingly weak. "I just got the wind knocked out of me, nothing else. The guy barely touched me. Look, pull some strings, Doc, get me out of this place."

"There's no hurry," Kitty said. "They want you here for observation, at least for a couple of days. I'll get you a toothbrush and some things."

"And my Blue Cross card," Hammel grinned. "Don't forget that, honey. No use adding insult to injury."

Gannet knew it would be useless to protest—Kitty had that determined look. He gave her his apartment key, and she kissed him on the forehead and left. He was glad for the moment alone with Hammel. With some bitterness he said, "You were wrong, Doc."

"What do you mean?"

"You and your theories! Those men without mouths. You thought I was being haunted by a lot of ghosts from the past, but you were wrong!"

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I saw another one—tonight! And it wasn't a

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man—this was a woman!"

"What?"

"You heard me," Gannet said, his voice stronger now. "I saw a woman without a mouth. And there isn't a woman in my whole life I ever—I mean, I ever felt guilty about. So your whole idea goes up the flue! They aren't ghosts of the past!"

Hammel shrugged. "I told you I wasn't a psychiatrist. Maybe my diagnosis was wrong, or maybe it was incomplete. Anxieties aren't always that simple to understand."

After Hammel had left, Gannet stared at the white ceiling of his hospital room and wondered about it. He knew he had to be right, and the doctor wrong. There hadn't been any need for that tape-recorded confession after all.

Then he remembered where the tape was, and where he kept his important documents—like Blue Cross cards.

Alarmed, he threw back the covers of his bed and put his feet on the floor. A moment of dizziness, then he was all right again. He went to the locker on the opposite wall and saw that the emergency-room orderly had simply hung his street clothes inside. He dressed as quickly as his physical condition allowed and left the room, trying to look like a visitor instead of a patient.

When he opened his front door, he knew that what he feared had come true.

Kitty had looked in the top drawer of his desk and seen its contents. The gun might not have disturbed her; she knew he owned a gun, and understood his fear of the jungle city. But she had also seen the envelope, and its mysterious instructions, and he knew that Kitty would be too curious to leave the tape unplayed. She had always been as nosy as a kitten, hence her nickname; her given name was Mary, not Katherine.

From the moment he stepped inside he could hear the drone of his own voice on the tape, talking about Chaudry, talking about Santione, talking about all the others. He felt a cold sickening clutch at his heart. *All* the others, dear God in heaven!

He pushed open the closed library doors and saw her at his desk. He hardly recognized her. Her face was bleached of color, and shock had done something strange to the angle of her eyes and the line of her jaw. She looked at him and snapped off the tape machine. She said, "Second time."

"What?" Gannet said.

"It's the second time I played it. I heard it the first time, but I didn't believe it. I didn't!"

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"You shouldn't have listened! Didn't you read what it said on the envelope? Didn't you?"

"Daddy," Kitty was moaning. "Oh, Daddy." He knew she didn't mean him. He was "Uncle" to her, never Daddy.

"Oh, God, honey, listen to me," Gannet pleaded. "You don't know about these things. You don't know how a man gets pushed and shoved in this world until he has to be like an animal. That's the only reason, Kitty, try to understand!"

She was rewinding the tape.

"No, no, Kitty, don't, honey," he begged. "Don't torture us any more, don't."

But she rewound the tape and started it near the end of his guilty recitation.

". . . *Phil Bolduc,*" his voice said. "*Cerittos, California. He was a junk dealer, narcotics, not scrap iron: That was, let's see, 1965, February. Yeah, I remember February, because it was cold, freezing in New York and I was glad to get a job out west.*"

"Stop it, Kitty!" Gannet cried, feeling his soul shredding.

"*Tom Wykoff,*" his voice went on inexorably. "*Same year, same state, I think it was in November. That was almost the last one. Except for. . .*" He remembered how he had hesitated. "*Except for Joe Russo. Joe had this daughter in college. They called her Kitty. He was worried about her finding out what he was doing, he never stopped worrying about that. Only then they needed a fall guy for a payroll job that went sour and they picked Joe and he refused. He said he wouldn't take a rap, he said he'd spill first, so that made him a hit case. I told them I didn't want to do the job, Joe was my friend, he was like family, but they didn't care about that. It was like a test of my loyalty, they said, I had to do the job.*" Silence. The tape was over.

Kitty didn't bother to switch it off. She looked at Gannet and said, "Is that why you took such good care of me, Uncle Marty, is that why?"

"You heard what I said, honey! Joe was like family, and you, too. But orders were orders. You think it wouldn't have worked the same way for your Daddy if he was told to hit me?"

"Is this the gun you did it with?"

She reached into the drawer.

"Is it, Uncle Marty? Is this the gun?"

"Put it down, honey, that thing is loaded."

"Tell me how you killed my father! Your best friend! Why don't you tell me how?"

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"Put it down, please," Gannet said.

He walked quietly up to the desk, and she fired. The bullet had only inches to travel, and the force of it knocked him halfway across the room. But he had time enough to see Kitty's face, and knew that she was as surprised as he was that her finger had squeezed the trigger.

He thought, sometimes we're haunted by the past, sometimes by the future. . .and then he was unconscious.

The room was full of misty rain. But the rain was white, blindingly white, and without moisture. The sky had the rounded look of a silvery bowl, and Gannet blinked at it and wondered if it was day or night.

He thought about the possibility of being dead, but there was something pressing underneath him that seemed too tangible; death wouldn't feel this way, he was sure of that. But where was he, and why?

Then his vision cleared somewhat, and he saw the man without a mouth.

He wanted to scream, but couldn't; something had deprived him of the power to make any sound, even though the terrible apparition was standing above him, looking down with piercing eyes, and he had no mouth.

Then there was another one beside the first, and then still another, all with no mouths. Then there was a woman, her mouthless face swimming into focus over his head, and again Gannet tried to make his terror vocal, but he failed.

Then he heard one of them speak, even without a mouth, able to form words.

"Eyelids moving. What's taking the anesthesia so long?"

"Fighting it," another voice said.

"Pulse dropping," the woman said.

"We're losing him, Ed!"

"Past tense, Phil," the first one said, the first man without a mouth, and Gannet closed his eyes and entered the welcoming dark. The surgeon named Phil removed his mask and wiped the sweat off his lips as he turned to leave the Operating Room.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Chick Kelly story by

S. S. RAFFERTY

Chick Kelly is back—the breezy, brassy night-club comic with a lingo all his own. And this time it's murder in TV-pilot land—which is not surprising since Chick finds himself involved with a motley crew if ever there was one. Hang in, Chick!

CALL 'EM, CHICK!

by S. S. RAFFERTY

Barry Kantrowitz should be working for *National Geographic* instead of being my theatrical agent. He is a gold-plated genius at finding out-of-the-way places. That's a superb talent for organizing expeditions, but it's a klutzy way to map a comic's career. When he calls and tells me that I have a fabulous two-week shot in Totten, Pa., I inform him that I am not giddy with glee. I also bring up proper nouns like New York, Miami, Vegas, Dallas, and other spots where people have been known to laugh, and might again if Chick Kelly were exposed to them. That, of course, is his cue to go into his Old Uncle Barry bit.

"Chick baby, believe me, take the booking. It's a very rigid scene in the business right now. The whole country is on twofers. Maybe we'll get something on the mainline, but right now you need the bread, sweetheart."

Of course he's right. There's a guy somewhere in the vaults of Chase Manhattan who gets seasick when he sends out my checking statement every month. So I hum a few bars of *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen* and deliver myself into the hands of the Penn Central.

I've got a lot of bad habits, and one of them is prejudging things. The Rhinelander Inn is more of a resort than a hotel. The most surprising thing is that it attracts a young crowd, mostly honeymooners. So I scrap my "old folks" routine and do the upbeat stuff. Hey, I

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tell you this gig is a gas, and Chick Baby is doing very well, thank you. I do the one about the two computers who fall in love, and man, they eat it up. Instead of twenty minutes I'm doing like an hour every night. Everything I do is right. Hell, I'm even getting laughs with the Cabbages and Peas number I stole from Bea Lillie. I'm on a real upper, and then this guy asks me if I want to do a TV show.

I thought I recognized him, but I wasn't sure until he introduced himself as Larry Carter. That killed my dream of TV fame. About five years ago Larry Carter was as big as you can get on the tube. He was Mr. Quiz and was ringing up Neilson numbers that made network VPs smile in their sleep. Then someone opened the laundry-bag on Mr. Quiz, and his sheets were five shades on the other side of tattletale gray. It was a mess. Rigged questions, kick-backs from winners. It was a smelleroo that gave Carter a one-way ticket to Nowheres-ville.

But, he explains to me over a couple of drinks, the public forgets and forgives, and never turn down a good idea—and he has a beauty of a scheme.

He knows the networks don't touch him with a four-hundred-and-fifty-foot pole, but he still has pals in the local markets. Carter has tailored a quiz show built around honeymooners. It's corny enough to appeal to the afternoon viewers, and by putting it out in syndication direct to local stations he avoids problems with the networks. It made a lot of sense, especially since he wants me to co-host for the comedy relief.

Of course, everything is on spec, with no money till he sells the pilot, but what do I care? I've got the Rhinelander salary and he's taping the show during the day. It's a shot at the tube, boys and girls, and Chick is rarin' to go. Then I saw what kind of lashup Carter was running, and I not only had second thoughts, but third and fourth ones.

What Carter called a "stu-dio" was what my childhood coloring book called a barn. The main set was in the center of the building, surrounded by kleigs and containing a jury box with two cupids holding a scroll that read *Match Mate* in script letters. Overhead, in what was probably a loft, was a jury-rigged control room which you got to via a spiral staircase. The perimeter of the set was a mess of cables and electronic spaghetti that fed power to two cameras that dated back to the old Dumont Network.

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If you think that's bad, let me introduce you to the crew. It was a Rogue's Regiment. There were three of them: Sally Morgan, the show's writer, was a dumpy bird about 35 and a future candidate for Weight Watchers; and on the technical side were the chief engineer, Cory Sherman, and the director, Bill Jenks. Sherman was a drunk and Jenks looked like he had a few problems salted away. I got all my inside information from Tina Schwenkfelder, a blonde piece of Pennsylvania pastry who was recruited from the local gentry to serve as secretary-script girl.

Tina is very open with me because she is in love with Chick Kelly. Note I didn't say she was in love with *me*. She was in love with the role. But pastry being what it is, I immediately resigned from Lovers Anonymous and suggested we start thinking about picking out furniture. My second wife used to say that getting mixed up with a comic was like putting your head in a mangle. The only thing good about it was when you stopped. She did. Tina would. But in the meantime she was giving me an earful.

Sally Morgan was toiling away in a rinkydink ad agency in Philly when she dreamed up the Match Mate idea and brought it to Larry Carter. Cory Sherman had been swimming upstream in a river of bourbon since he blew a big network engineering job years ago. Jenks the director was a technical genius who got bounced out of a college professorship for thinking pink and having pen pals in Russia. These were the little elves who were going to help me up the yellow brick road to an Emmy?

Every day was Disasterville. Lights would blow, cameras break down, and the two competing couples acted like robots. The Jordans were the All-American couple. Tanned, lean, and dumb. The Fines were our ethnic couple. Carter believed that you had to have ethnic balance on the show. In future programs, after he sold the pilot, there would be a black couple, a Polish couple, etc., until he used up everybody including the Eskimos. Tina, my lovelady, told me that there was some friction between the Jordan guy and Carter because Mr. Quiz was very friendly with Mrs. Jordan, and was starting the "You ought to be in pictures" malarky.

We were four days into this fiasco and finally it looked as if we were ready to roll. We had lost two hours that morning because camera number two had upped and died. Jenks the

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director-genius spent about an hour trying to revive it, then suggested that we work with one camera. Back we go to the set where we wait for Carter to return from a phone call.

Finally everything is in place. The couples are in the jury box, Sally is off camera about ten feet from me. Cory Sherman is up in the control booth, probably asphyxiating himself with alcohol breath, and Jenks is over at the stairway getting ready to give hand cues to the cameraman. He had to do it that way because the intercom unit had also quit.

On signal Mr. Quiz steps to the podium, smiles, and says, "Welcome folks, welcome to Match Mate, featuring that funny, funny man—"

My name didn't come out of his mouth, but a curl of sickish smoke rose up from the collar of his tux. His contorted face was frozen on the line monitor, bearing witness to the electrocution.

The way the Pennsylvania State Police figured it out, someone had plugged Larry Carter into the Shenandoah Light and Power System. It was no accident, because his body mike wire had been deliberately scraped and crossed with the main power line.

The cops took everybody back to the Inn and started the Twenty Questions routine. They worked me over for about an hour, but they were gentle about it. Did you ever notice that when a cop is gentle, he is really baffled. This case made them look like a flock of sheep.

As it turned out, everybody on the set was a witness for someone else. I could swear that Jenks the director never left his spot by the stairs because I was watching him for hand cues. Jenks, in turn, could swear that Cory Sherman never left the control booth, because he would have had to pass Jenks at the foot of the stairs. Sally Morgan couldn't have gotten to the spot where the wire was crossed without being in camera range. Since we could all see the cameraman and the two couples, they were out.

But if the cops were short on opportunity, they were long on motive. They had Sherman and Jenks down for just plain hate. Carter had constantly belittled them, and they only took hope that the pilot would sell and they'd be back in the big time again. The Morgan dame was upset over Carter's addiction to a drug called Mrs. Jordan. Man, they were pulling out all the stops!

After they turned me loose, I met Tina in the cocktail lounge for a nip. She usually

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drinks buttermilk, but she "me too'd" when I ordered my usual VTNL, vodka and tonic no lime.

Sammy the bartender was asking us about Carter's drop-dead act and incidentally mentioned that Mr. Quiz owed quite a tab at the Rhinelander. He told us some other tidbits about lady guests that really put the skunk tag on the deceased. He kept spinning out the dirt while Tina went out to the main desk in answer to a loudspeaker page. When she came back she was in a rush and looked a bit confused.

"How many lawyers can a man have, for gosh sakes," she said. Forgive the gosh sakes, folks, she's just a country girl. "He wants me to go back there, for gosh sakes, and I don't think the police will let me. I told him to talk to them first."

If you're confused, stay cool. Chick will interpret. It took me about ten minutes and fifteen for-gosh-sakeses and I like you too much to put you through it. The phone call was from Carter's lawyer in Philadelphia. He had just heard about Carter over the news and wanted Tina to get Carter's papers together. The news report didn't mention murder. It just said that the police were investigating.

Then my little babycakes drops the bomb on me. The man she just talked to was named Garber, but the lawyer who called Carter this morning said his name was Holloway. Matt Holloway. Bango! It's idea-time at the ol' corral.

"Did Holloway say he was Carter's lawyer?" I asked.

"No, but Mr. Carter said he was his lawyer when I told him he had a phone call this morning."

Then she goes on to tell me that Carter had been annoyed at her for interrupting a conference he was having with Miss Morgan, Sherman, and Jenks. "He just gave me a mean look when I told him who was calling and said, 'What do the bloody lawyers want now,' and went off to take the call."

"And this was this morning, right after the camera broke down?"

She nodded her pretty head and I could have kissed her. She had just handed me the nicest piece of publicity I could ask for. If I could put this all together and nail the killer before the boys with the brass buttons did, and then break the story to the papers—wowie! *Comic Chick Kelly Catches Killer!* Maybe I'll get a crack at a tough-guy role. Who knows?

But first I have to check something fast. Leaving the love of my life with another VTNL

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in front of her, I make it to the nearest phone booth.

Before his secretary came to work for Barry Kantrowitz, I swear she was one of Stalin's guards. It took me fifty cents more before Uncle Barry got on the line.

"Chick sweetheart, how's it going down there in Joplin?" That's my Uncle Barry, folks, guiding my career with a knowing hand.

"Joplin is in Missouri, Barry. I'm in Totten. That's in Pennsylvania. Did you ever hear of it?"

"Who doesn't know Pennsylvania? Lawrence Welk came from there, right? Nice man, Lawrence. A real humanitarian."

"Listen, Barry, stop doing a Georgie Jessel and listen to me. I'm sitting on top of something that could do us both a lot of good. How well do you know Matt Holloway?"

"Like a brother."

"How well, Barry? That is important."

"Well, maybe like a cousin. But you're rushing things. You're not ready for that kind of jump, Chick baby."

"I don't want you to pitch me to him. I want you to ask him a question. Did he talk with Larry Carter by phone this morning, and if he did, see if you can find out why."

"Larry Carter? Who's Larry Carter?"

"Mr. Quiz, remember?"

"That bum, you know that bum? Chick darling, let me give you some good sound advice."

Shutting Barry off is no easy task, but I managed it. After giving him the Inn's telephone number and getting him to promise to call Holloway right away, I hung up and went back to the lounge.

It took about an hour for Kantrowitz to get back to me, and by that time Tina was slurring her for-gosh-sakeses. When they paged me, I left her in Sammy's care.

Man, did I ever call this long shot. Bango. Matt Holloway had phoned Carter this morning. That's all I needed to know. Because that was all the killer needed to know.

Let me give you the noodle on this. You probably never heard of Matt Holloway, but if you're in show biz, you have. He is vice-president of programing at a major network and a very powerful man. When Tina mentioned his name in front of his three cohorts, Carter tried to cover it feebly. You see, it was a double cross if there ever was one. Carter was telling us that he was going the syndication route, but he was really looking for network backing. And, according to Kantrowitz's

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report, he had a tentative agreement with the network based on the outcome of the pilot. They figured that after five years Carter could make a comeback.

So cutey-pie Carter was using all our talents for free. If the network took the show, neither Jenks nor Sherman stood a chance of going along with him. And I was willing to bet that Sally Morgan didn't own as much of the show as she thought.

Okay, Kelly. So far, so good. We had a real motive now, and three suspects. That sounded hunky-dory except for one snag. I'm a witness for both Sherman and Jenks. If Sherman came down the stairs and passed Jenks, we both would have seen him. And Jenks never moved a muscle. That left Sally Morgan, which left me nowhere, because it was physically impossible for her to get to the wire area.

Leaving Tina to the ravages of alcohol, I went up to the bedroom suite which the cops were using as their headquarters. I told the lieutenant in charge that I had left some things at the studio and needed them for the show tonight. To my surprise he said to go right ahead. His guys were through with the picture-taking and the dusting for prints.

I spent about an hour tracing the electronic spaghetti that led from the control room to the floor area. I had an idea that Sherman could have set up the wires in advance and then triggered them from the control room. But no soap. Then I tried to figure out a way that Sally Morgan might have gotten to the bare wire, but still no soap.

It was getting late and I had a show to do. So I started to hustle out of there, tripped over one of the cables, and went sprawling. I gave my elbow a nasty bump and right away I'm doing a line about my funny-bone for the show. I'm chuckling to myself when I look up and see Jenks the Genius standing by the stairs.

"Hey, man," I said to him, "want to give the wounded a hand?"

But I can't figure out what's wrong with the guy. He's just standing there staring off into space.

"What's the matter, buddy?" I said, getting to my feet and walking over to him. The only thing between us was the camera that broke down this morning. I reached to push it out of the way when I found myself on the floor again, but I didn't trip this time. I was shoved. Shoved real hard and it knocked the wind out of me.

"Sorry, Kelly," the lieu-

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tenant said, helping me to my feet. "I didn't want your prints on that camera. I like my evidence nice and clean. You okay?"

I told him yes, but I must have broken something like the main gear in my head, because Jenks had disappeared. "What's going on here?" I asked him.

"When you took that header you activated the camera somehow."

"But it doesn't work. It's busted."

"As a camera, yes. But as a projector it works just fine. See?"

He flicked a switch and I went bananas. There in front of me was Jenks again. I put my hand out and it went right through him.

"He rigged the broken camera as a three-dimensional infra-red projector."

"You mean Jenks projected a shot of himself by the stairs and then left to do a job on the wire and came back amid all the confusion after Carter got the juice?"

"That's right. You were his alibi pigeon."

I can see myself getting any credit for this deal sinking like a rock. "Look, Lieutenant. In a way I came to the same conclusion you did. I mean, you just got lucky before I did. I have some information I could trade which would give you a strong motive peg."

"If you're talking about Holloway, I spoke with him by phone this afternoon. We had all the incoming calls to the studio today traced. As for getting lucky, forget it. The background data on Jenks showed he taught optics and had done basic research in IR projection. Our technical people put two and two together."

So that's the story of my life. And to make matters worse, I missed the show because the cops locked me up on a phony protective custody rap because they don't want me blabbing my mouth off before Jenks makes a try at unloading the camera. They figure that will make the case conclusive. Jenks doesn't make a move for two days, and when he does they put him in the slammer and then I get out.

Then this clown of a manager at the Inn tells me he isn't paying me for the shows I missed, and I get huffy and he fires me. It is just as well, because some genius let Tina sleep it off in my room which is where her three farmer brothers found her. Since they are not Quakers, I found myself truckin' back to the Big Apple. God knows where Kantrowitz will book me next—if he'll ever book me at all.

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a *NEW* short story by

JOYCE HARRINGTON

Joyce Harrington's first story, "The Purple Shroud" in the September 1972 issue of EQMM, achieved the highest possible honor that can be won by a mystery short story. It was awarded the coveted Edgar by MWA (Mystery Writers of America, Inc.) as the best short story in the mystery field published in American magazines and books during 1972. We were not surprised: we had hailed Joyce Harrington as "a new and impressive talent," and her story as "an exceptional debut in print."

Her second story, "The Plastic Jungle," appeared in EQMM only three months after her first. Since it was still 1972, the second story also qualified for Edgar consideration; but MWA awarded the laurel wreath to the first story. Personally, we thought "The Plastic Jungle" an "even better, even more impressive" story than "The Purple Shroud," and again we praised the author's talent.

Now we give you Joyce Harrington's third story, and again she has produced a "sensitively written study in crime, as contemporary, as modern as tonight's late news." To quote the author herself, the new story deals with "cultural conflicts and the perils of not understanding one's neighbor."

Things grow in Brooklyn besides trees. . .

MY NEIGHBOR, AY

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

It all started the day the old man on the top floor next door emptied his spittoon out the window and the wind was blowing from the east. It wasn't what you might call an elegant antique of a spittoon. More like an old coffee can, and I caught

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the flash of tin up there in the fifth-floor walkup out of the corner of my eye as I was crouched over my tenderly cherished Christian Dior rose-bush inspecting for aphis with a banana peel at the ready.

My wife, Brenda, who was flaked out on the garden chaise in her green bikini promoting a city suntan, caught more than a flash of tin.

"Rats! It's raining," she muttered before she opened her eyes. When she finally did get them open and adjusted to bright blue sky and dazzling August sunshine and a case of instant full-length freckles, she screamed.

"What is it? Damn, what is it? Who did that?"

She scrambled off the chaise and the freckles began to slither in streaky rivulets toward her belly button and down her incredibly long and slender legs. A few dripped off her chin and fell into her well-proportioned cleavage.

"It's not tea leaves, honey."

I must confess that the sight of lissome, fastidious Brenda spattered from head to toe with second-hand chewing tobacco brought out the snide side of my character, and I had difficulty gulping down a fit of guffaws. For my pains I was rewarded with a fit of hiccups.

"Will you stop that stupid noise and *DO SOMETHING!*" she shrieked. Have you ever seen anyone turn red with rage all over? That was Brenda. Bright pink actually, overlaid with lengthening stripes and scattered specks of mahogany, the whole girl trembling and angrier than I'd ever seen her.

I turned away, ostensibly to deposit my banana peel at the foot of Christian Dior, and managed to subdue the grin that was quirking at the corners of my mouth. It crossed my mind that somone had once told me tobacco, like banana peel, was good for roses, but I couldn't remember why. It definitely wasn't good for Brenda.

"A shower, perhaps?" I hiccupped. "I'll scrub your back."

"A shower! A disinfecting is what I need! Don't just stand there. Call the police!'

"What'll I tell them? My wife has been spat on wholesale? I'll get you some paper towels." I started for the kitchen door.

"Don't leave me here like this. Do something! If you won't call the police, I will. I will, I will, I will!" Tears were beginning to add to the mess on Brenda's face and the shocked rigidity was leaving her outflung arms. She was making an awful lot of noise.

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"Do you want to stay like that so the police can see the evidence?" I grabbed the real-estate section of the Sunday *Times* and began tentative mopping-up operations, at the same time trying to steer her indoors.

"Stop that, you nit! You're just making it worse."

She was right. Heads were beginning to appear at the rear windows of the surrounding brownstones. Brenda came to her senses long enough to realize that she was the star of this backyard melodrama, and then fled howling to the bathroom.

"I'll speak to Guttierez," I called after her.

When the shower had been drumming satisfactorily for at least five minutes and I had subdued my hiccups, I put on a clean shirt and a stern manner and marched next door. Guttierez owned this next-door brownstone, outwardly an identical twin of ours, and lived in the basement apartment with his silent, round-faced, brown-eyed wife, and four not-so-silent young sons. Upstairs, Guttierez rented rooms. The house was a mini-U.N. and the sounds that flowed out through the open windows were the normal sounds of people living loudly in Spanish, Haitian French, West Indian lilted English, with an occasional bright thread of Pakistani or Chinese. It was microcosmic Brooklyn in the summer of the brownstone generation.

I rang the bell. Somewhere inside a buzzer zapped and there was instant quiet. I waited a few moments. Then a flowered plastic curtain at the barred basement window twitched. I hit the buzzer again. Pretty soon an inner door rattled, an outer door rattled, and a miniature Guttierez materialized inside the iron gate of the basement entrance.

"Hi," I said masterfully.

Young Guttierez masterfully non-replied and stared absolutely without blinking for a year-long minute before I tried again. This was really a job for Brenda who used to boast of having read *El Cid* in the original during her Hunter College days. I sighed and spoke again.

"Um, hi there. Is your father home?"

Reinforcements arrived in the shape of an even smaller and more solemn Guttierez sporting a T-shirt lettered *Puerto Rico Encanta.* Double-barreled silence for another minute, then the curtain twitched again. I was about to leave, defeated by this one-sided confrontation, when the two

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small brown bodies erupted into noise and action. They pounded away back into their lair squealing, *Mama, Mama venga! Mira, Mama, un hombre!*"

The squeals receded into a distant interior chattering, and I stood with my nose pressed to the iron grille, trying to decide whether it was worthwhile waiting around for someone over the age of five to come to the door. My whole attention was riveted through those open inner doors, listening to the rapid incomprehensible chatter, breathing in the fumes of something cooking vaguely connected in my sensory apparatus with Brenda's superb *paella*, and hoping for the sound of adult footsteps to head in my direction.

My concentration on the Guttierez interior was such that I failed to notice the adult footsteps coming up behind me. I whirled at the sound of the voice and almost fell into the lidless garbage can beside the door.

"Ello, 'ello. What you wan' here?"

I suspected Guttierez of being slightly deaf. He always spoke in a modified roar. In the circumstances it was a bit unnerving, and I felt like the notorious neighborhood mailbox burglar caught in the act. Add to this the fact that although Guttierez and I were about the same height, I was standing one step down in the entrance to his castle. He towered over me with a six-pack of beer in each hand. It was difficult to remember that as Guttierez always roared, he always glowered even when playing stick ball with his kids, and I had no desire to get beaned with the *cerveza fria*.

"Hello there. Um, I was just looking for you. Nice day, isn't it?"

I'm ashamed to say that my voice came out somewhat higher than its normal range, and suspicion flamed all over Guttierez' face. He took a firmer grip on his six-packs.

"You lookin' for me? What you wan'?"

"Well, Mr. Guttierez, I'm Jack Rollins. I live next door, you know?"

I got my voice back down into its normal range, but I was having difficulty getting to the point. I scrambled up out of the entryway and felt a little better facing Guttierez at eye level.

"*Si*, I know. What you wan'?"

He was obviously impatient to get inside to whatever was cooking that smelled so good. Whispers and giggles came from behind the twitching curtain, and I caught an occasional

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"Americano" between the giggles.

"Well, Mr. Guttierez, the old man on the top floor, you know?"

"*Si?*"

"Well, he throws things out the window."

"*Si?*"

"Well, he empties his spittoon out the window."

"*Si?* What is this 'spittoon'?"

I sighed, inaudibly I hoped, and tried again.

"Well, he chews tobacco, you know? And he spits it in a can. And then he throws it out the window."

"Oh, *si!* He is one filthy old man, him."

I squared my shoulders and prepared to do battle for my wife's honor. The guy's machismo was beginning to rub off on me.

"Well, see here, Guttierez. It's got to stop. It landed on my wife today."

"Oh, *lastima!* You wife! She with the bathing suit? In the backyard?"

It was the first time I had ever seen Guttierez smile. He was grinning. He was positively leering.

"That's right. My wife. And I want something done about it." I hoped I was scowling at least as fiercely as Guttierez normally did.

"What you wan' to do? You wan' to fight him? He is *muy viejo*, very old. An' he have one leg. You wan' to fight him?"

"No, I don't want to fight him! He's your tenant. You should speak to him. Tell him it's against the law to throw things out the window. Tell him I'll call the police."

"You called police?" Guttierez was beginning to bristle and his grin vanished.

"No, not yet. But if he does it one more time I will. You tell him that."

"Okay. I tell him. No more out the window."

A young Guttierez, who had been lurking just inside the gate throughout our exchange, now opened the gate and took the beer from his father's hands. Guttierez went through the gate, and as he turned to close it he grinned once more.

"Tell you wife she is verry pretty."

The gate slammed and the chatter and giggles reached a crescendo.

Back in my own renovated townhouse, I settled into my black-leather Eames chair and sought solace with the Sunday *Times* crossword puzzle. The shower was still splashing, so I was safe from vengeance until Brenda got her hair dry. Before attacking square one across I sat back and admired for perhaps

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the hundredth time the restored beauty of my front parlor.

Brenda and I had scraped and Red Deviled and polished the woodwork, plastered and spackled and painted, replaced missing bits of molding. We had labored mightily and with love, and the result was a gleaming, pristine Victorian mansion with all mod cons, a duplex apartment upstairs which rented at a price that paid the mortgage, and our own lower duplex with garden. Our piece of the city.

I shook my head over Brenda's rage, decided it was justified, and clicked my ballpoint pen into action. The air conditioner hummed gently, producing just the right amount of refrigeration, and I lost myself in the wiles of the puzzle which bore the theme of "The Last Resort." I puzzled away for perhaps twenty minutes and was somewhat nearer sleeping than waking when Brenda stalked into the room.

"Well?" she demanded. The shower had cleaned her up but had not cooled her off.

"Ah, what's a ten-letter word for African animal ending in 'u'?"

"Lesser Kudu. What happened?" Brenda was always very good at natural history.

"Thanks. Aren't you cold?"

She had exchanged her spattered green bikini for a pair of shocking-pink short shorts and a purple scarf intricately tied to allow maximum bare skin and freedom of motion.

"No, I'm not cold. It's ninety-two degrees outside. Did you call the police?"

"Well, no. It's very cool in here. The air conditioner is on high." I settled deeper into my chair to give the impression of extreme comfort and immovability.

"If you didn't call the police, what did you do?"

"Well, I spoke to Guttierez. You aren't going outside again, are you? Like that?" I knew I was doing this all wrong. Brenda wasn't the sort of girl you could safely practise machismo on.

"Of course I am. It's my backyard, isn't it? What did Guttierez say?"

"He said you were verry pretty. He asked if I wanted to fight the old guy."

"Oh, damn, you're impossible!" She dropped onto the blue-velvet Victorian chaise longue which was her pride and joy, and she almost laughed. "Did you ever get to the point?"

"Oh, yes. Point Number One, Guttierez will speak to the old guy. And Point Number Two, your sunbathing gives

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great visual pleasure to the surrounding natives. Does Mrs. G. ever sunbathe?"

"Of course not. She's always pregnant. There's a steak for the barbecue. Shall I light the fire now?"

During the week following "L'Affaire Tabac" the heat wave was still melting Madison Avenue. Brenda and I shuttled between our air-conditioned jobs and our air-conditioned bedroom, ducking in and out of air-conditioned restaurants along the way. Neither one of us felt much like cooking or even eating with the thermometer pushing 100 day after day, and the humidity making my best Brooks Brothers young-executive-on-the-rise wash-and-wear blue-and-white stripe look like a much worn and seldom washed suit of the latest in limp dishrag.

The management of the aggressive young ad agency where Brenda wrote copy had considered going on a four-day week for the summer, but had decided that there were too many Goliaths abroad on the Avenue to leave the slingshots unmanned (or unwomanned) for even one day. So Brenda hammered away at producing bright, clever words designed to sell bras and all-in-ones to the overfed female population of the nation, while I sweltered and accounted for the bookkeeping vagaries of an endless roster of small-business clients of the mammoth accounting firm where I C.P.A.'d. We both regretted our decision to save our vacation time for a January ski tour of Europe.

If we noticed Guttierez and company at all it was only in passing on the evening drag from subway to cool haven. A clutter of brown humanity, stoop-sitting, hoping for a breeze from the bay or even from the Gowanus Canal, and tossing Malta Hatvey cans languidly toward the garbage cans and just missing. Occasionally we heard a guitar and plaintive island songs, and saw the kids trundling second-hand plastic tricycles up and down the sidewalk. Mrs. Guttierez had tried to brighten the small front yard with a few marigolds, but the heat and pounding children's feet had left only a few yellow tatters among the popsicle wrappers on the packed earth.

We passed without acknowledgment, either of overtures toward mutual understanding or mutual hostility. It was too darned hot.

One night, though, we were forced to take notice.

The heat had lifted slightly and the air was electric with

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premonitions of a storm. Despite the threat of rain Brenda and I decided to take a chance on Shakespeare in the Park. We did it in style: Brasserie box lunches (paté, *ratatouille*, cold chicken) and chilled champagne (New York State) while waiting in line; a rather fine *Macbeth* with distant thunder obligingly produced on cue by the great Stage Manager in the Catskills; and afterward a taxi home across the Brooklyn Bridge with the lights of our town, ships in the Narrows, the Verrazano Bridge crowning the evening with the spectacle which never palled.

We pulled up outside our house and paid off the driver, adding a generous happy-time tip. A gale-force wind was blowing off the bay and up our street, bending the newly planted plane trees into fragile arcs. Above the clatter of the frantic leaves and the din of the wind playing Frisbee with the garbage-can lids, the roar of Guttierez was heard. The stoop-sitters were energized, plugged in to the crackling atmosphere. The children, not yet in bed, huddled smear-faced and wide-eyed on the top step.

Mrs. Guttierez wept loudly in the arms of a broad full-bellied Indian-faced woman who shrieked imprecations to the tops of houses. Armed with a saw-toothed bread knife. Guttierez bellowed and stabbed the air. The opposition, small, thin, dark, and very drunk, whirled a baseball bat above his head with both hands. The two men circled each other on the sidewalk, slowfooted, eyes aglint with the adrenalin of battle, searching for the deadly opportunity and shouting macho insults at each other.

Brenda stared, breath held, her body stiff with shock and rooted to the pavement.

"Inside!" I shouted. "Get inside!"

She didn't move. She didn't hear. She was hypnotized.

"My God!" she breathed at last. "They'll kill each other."

The wind plastered her long hair across her face, and a single fat raindrop fell on my hand as I tried to drag her away.

"Get into the house, Brenda." I spoke as calmly as I could. "The rain will stop it."

Her fascination broke abruptly, and she whirled on me, her eyes wild with near-hysteria.

"Police!" she screamed. "They'll kill each other! Call the police! I'll do it!"

She bolted for the entrance to our fortress and began scrabbling in her purse for keys. I had mine ready, but the seconds necessary for manipulating the double locks seemed

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like hours with Brenda shivering impatiently behind me and the shouts and weeping continuing unabated on the sidewalk.

I flung the gate open and Brenda charged through, rattling the double doors and racing down the hall to the telephone. I went back for another look at the combatants. They were still circling, still brandishing their weapons, still shouting. There was not another soul to be seen on the block—no late dog-walkers, no midnight loiterers at the corner bodega, no curious heads at windows.

Lightning flashed somewhere over Staten Island, coming closer, and raindrops spattered the sidwalk. I felt fairly sure that Guttierez and enemy would continue their Mexican stand-off until the deluge, then put down their armaments and go inside for another beer. But you never could tell. When the thunder rolled I went inside and relocked the double locks.

Brenda, at the kitchen phone, was just concluding her conversation with 911. In a tight, edgy voice she gave her name and address.

"Please hurry," she added. "I'm afraid they'll kill each other."

I could imagine the laconic voice on the other end of the wire giving assurance that law and order were on the way, lady. Brenda hung up the phone and dug a cigarette out of her bag, lighting it at the gas range.

"Jack." She slumped in the telephone chair and surveyed the chrome and terra cotta tile, electronic oven and massive freezer, the ranks of custom-built walnut cabinets.

"Jack, we've done all this, and it's beautiful. I love it." She dragged deeply on her cigarette. "But I want out. I don't want to live next door to *THAT* any more."

"Where do you want to go, honey?" I began to massage her tight shoulders, her rigid neck. But she pulled away.

"How do I know? The damn suburbs. Westchester! Nyack! Bloody Australia! The farther the better."

"Brennie, you know you'd hate the suburbs. Those guys are just showing off for their women. They're enjoying every minute of it, and nobody's going to get hurt."

I had some small faith in my words and the flamboyant nature of our neighbors. Still, it was unnerving and not very neighborly to come home to brandished bread knives and baseball bats.

Brenda brooded unhappily.

"Come on, honey." I took her hand. "Let's go be spectators and see how long it

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takes the police to get here."

We took up stations at the darkened front-parlor window to find that one patrol car had already arrived, while another was flashing its way up the street.

"Well," I commented. "Nobody can say the fuzz doesn't respond in this neighborhood."

Guttierez, leaning indolently against the front fender of the police car, was answering the young officer's questions with expressions of sublime innocence and gestures of incredulity.

"Who, me?!!!" seemed to be the substance of his replies.

Mrs. Guttierez and the bread knife had disappeared. One child remained on the sidewalk, idly swinging the baseball bat. The small thin man and the Indian-looking woman leaned against the railing sipping from cans of liquid clothed in brown paper bags.

The wind had died. The trees stood expectantly, their leaves hanging limp and exhausted. A flash of lightning lit the scene in blue-white relief, and the rain crashed down.

The young policeman ducked inside his car with a final admonition to Guttierez, who nodded, tried to shake hands, then dashed for his house, picking up the boy and the baseball bat on the run. He was joined by the paper-bag drinkers, the woman laughing widely from her round jiggling belly and raising her face to the downpour. I could see her gold teeth.

After a few moments the police cars drove away, undoubtedly to respond to another crisis on another block. We watched the rain punish the empty street.

"Come on, Brennie." I hugged her. "It's bedtime."

We never found out what the argument had been about, but the next evening when we came home from work we found our backyard thoroughly inundated with garbage. There seemed to be about a ton of assorted chicken bones with fragments of yellow rice clinging stickily, dozens of the ubiquitous Malta Hatvey cans, watermelon rind and orange peel, coffee grounds, tea bags, and, yes, even the tobacco chewer of the fifth floor was represented.

"They must have taken up a collection." I tried to laugh, but it didn't come off very well. "What do you think, Brenda? The police again?"

Brenda seemed to have shrunk. Her eyes glazed over as she viewed the unexpected landfill.

"No, Jack," she said quietly. "I think the shovel and hose."

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Our neighbors remained invisible and inaudible during the clean-up operation. Brenda remained silent and tight-lipped, wielding her shovel with a tense energy which augured ill for the dispensers of the odiferous revenge. Side by side we shoveled and hosed. All my attempts to point up the ridiculous side of the great kitchen-midden caper fell decidedly flat.

"You should maybe get her recipe for *arroz con pollo.*"

Brenda shoveled.

"We could toss it all back with a little contribution of our own. Make it a real classy garbage war. *Coq au vin* bones, congealed quiche, rind of brie, and shell of clam. Just think how we could expand their horizons."

Brenda swept, and looked determined.

"This may be the answer to the city's disposal problem. Just keep tossing it back and forth. You keep it one day, I'll keep it the next."

"Just shut up and shovel!"

Brenda had the hose in her hand. I shut up and shoveled.

An hour and many plastic bags later Brenda was once again showering away rage and refuse. The refuse would go down the drain. The rage I was not too sure about. Brenda's usual form was an explosion of mildly profane wrath, followed by tremulous laughter or at the very least a self-conscious smirk. This was different. This was cold fury, silent and calculating. Brenda was up to something. And I didn't like it.

I made her a drink, gin and tonic in equal proportions with two wedges of lime, and took it into the bathroom.

"Hey, Bren. Here's a drink."

"Thanks." Steam billowed out of the shower and frosted the mahogany-framed mirror over the sink. I wrote *Bren & Jack 4ever* inside a lopsided heart.

"How about dinner at Gage and Tollner's?"

"No, thanks."

"How about dinner at Peter Luger's?"

"No."

"How about dinner?"

"I've lost my appetite."

Brenda without an appetite was like bagels without cream cheese. Unnatural. And for her to turn down a Peter Luger steak was worse than unnatural.

The shower shut off abruptly and Brenda emerged dripping, a pale bikini shape outlined against rosy sunburn.

"Dry you off, lady?"

"Just hand me that towel."

She snatched the towel from the rack before I could reach it, dried off in a frenzy of flapping terrycloth, and slid into her

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no-nonsense button-to-the-chin nightgown.

"If you can bear to think about food, there must be something in the fridge. I'm going to bed."

Sweating drink in hand, she long-legged it into the bedroom. I followed.

"Great idea. I could use a little nap myself. And then we can go to Peter Luger's."

Brenda whirled on me, sloshing her drink all over herself and the red shag bedroom rug.

"Beat it, Jack. Just bug off. I'm getting in that bed. And I'm going to drink this drink. Or what's left of it. And then I'm going to sleep, sleep, sleep! And I hope I never wake up! I want to be alone. Understand?"

"Okay, Garbo. Okay. All right. Pleasant dreams."

I slouched downstairs to the kitchen where I found sufficient material for a hero sandwich which, along with a couple of beers and my newest old Teddy Wilson records, induced a state of hopeful nirvana. Tomorrow would be better.

When I tiptoed into the bedroom around midnight, Brenda was asleep, asleep, asleep.

Tomorrow came right on schedule, and Brenda woke up. But refused to get out of bed. I brought her coffee, but she still refused to budge.

"Call the office around 9:30, Jack. Tell them I'm sick. I *am* sick." She buried her face in the pillow and moaned, unconvincingly.

"It's Friday. You can't call in sick on Friday."

"Oh, yes, I can. Anyway you're going to do it for me. Tell them I've got scurvy, beri-beri, jungle rot, anything. Garbage poisoning, that's what I've really got. Please, Jack. I really need a day off to pull myself together after last night. I'll be all right. I promise. Tell them I have a bad case of hives."

"Look, Brenda, you'd be better off to go to work and forget all about last night. It's over. Let it end."

"Hives, dear. In fact, I think I feel one blossoming on my left kneecap right now."

She sat up and scratched energetically and then piled all the pillows together into a cosy sickbed nest. Smiling and sipping coffee, she seemed altogether more like a normal Brenda. Last night's cold and silent fury must have been dissipated by ten hours of sleep on an empty stomach.

"Well," I wavered. "I hate to leave you like this."

"Don't worry. I just want to

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spend the day in bed with a good book. Haven't done that in a long time."

She settled in more snugly and pulled the covers up to her chin. She looked helpless and vulnerable, even though I knew better, and I really did hate to leave her.

"Shall I bring you something to eat?"

"No, thanks. I'll get up and boil an egg in a little while."

I guess that's what convinced me that all would be well. Soft-boiled eggs were convalescent food for Brenda. Whenever she was recovering from any kind of upset, physical or emotional, soft-boiled eggs appeared on the menu, and disappeared as soon as things were back to normal.

"Well." I knotted my tie. "I guess I'd better be going."

"All right, dear. Don't forget to call in for me. And don't worry." She was already thumbing through a magazine.

"You won't—uh—I mean, you'll stay away from—" I still was not entirely convinced that Brenda's intentions ran solely to bed rest and literature. "You won't start anything with Guttierez, will you?"

"No, dear. I won't start anything. I promise."

I left.

I spent a usual kind of Friday closing out the previous month's books in the super mod offices of a team of graphic designers. The bookkeeper, a minuscule and meticulous Japanese girl, drew graphically perfect numbers and persistently covered up her errors by adding or subtracting a totally fictitious petty-cash amount at the end of each month. Each month Sumi and I engaged in a polite skirmish in which errors were routed, the books balanced, and I laid down anew the simple rules of double entry. Each month Sumi accepted my edicts with apologetic and suitably flattering awe, and I felt like a samurai of the statistics. Until the next month.

I tried to reach Brenda several times during the day, but each time the line was busy.

By mid-afternoon I had settled Sumi's accounts and decided to knock off the rest of the day. It was one of those rare summer days in New York. The unsmogged sky was actually blue and gentle breezes meandered along the cross streets. The storm of the night before had washed away heat, humidity, and dog droppings, and as I walked the six blocks to the Grand Central subway station, the city and its people gleamed as dwellers in an iridescent and fantastic mirage.

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The subway put an end to fantasy with its congealed heat and the smell of generations of doomed hot dogs sweating out their grease on eternally rotating grills. On the train, sparsely populated with Alexander's shopping bags and noisy groups of day-camp kids, I welcomed the dank wind that swirled through the cars and wondered if this might not be a good weekend to take advantage of an open invitation to visit friends on Fire Island. There was plenty of time to catch an evening ferry, and two days of beachratting in congenial company would bring Brenda out of the garbage dumps.

She met me at the door suppressing manic laughter. Her eyes gave her away. Wild and triumphant, they sparkled with discharged venom. She grabbed my arm and before I could unload my attaché case or broach my Fire Island plan she dragged me to the window.

"Look, Jack." She was almost incoherent. "The gas company. It's the gas company."

"Well, sure. It's the gas company." It was not unusual to see a blue and yellow gas-company truck parked outside. I failed to comprehend Brenda's elation over this one.

"Oh, Jack! You don't get it. It's too fantastic! I reported a gas leak!"

I turned to sniff the air.

"Where is it? In the kitchen?" I headed for the stairs. "Did they find it yet?"

"No, dummy. You still don't get it. Next door. I reported a gas leak next door. And exposed wiring. And fire hazards in the halls. The fire inspectors have already been there. I'm still waiting for the housing department. You know, illegal roominghouse. He doesn't have a license. Overcrowding and rats. Plumbing violations, sewer smells. Rent gouging. Everything. Everything I could think of. I even called the Mayor's office, but he was off inspecting snowplows."

"In August?" I was stupefied. No adequate comment came to mind, and I stared out the window as two purposeful men in gas-company uniforms emerged from next door. "They're leaving now."

"Okay. Now what's next?" Brenda paced excitedly up and down the living room. "Child abuse! That's it. I'm sure he beats his kids. Where do you report child abuse?"

"Brenda! Knock it off. That's harassment. It's illegal. He could sue you, for God's sake."

"Harassment! What do you call garbage in our back yard?

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I'll sue *him*. I'll put him out of business. I'll close down that rat trap. Where's the phone book?"

Brenda's erratic pacing and arm waving came dangerously close to putting my blue Tiffany tablelamp out of business. I pulled her onto the sofa and held both her hands. She squirmed and fidgeted.

"Look, kid. You've done enough for one day. What do you say we call Jenny and Charley and spend the weekend on Fire Island?"

"Oh, no, Jack. We can't do that. We have an appointment tomorrow morning to look at houses in Westchester."

On Saturday we took an early train to wild and woolly Westchester to view real estate. We saw cathedral ceilings and three-car garages, pseudo-salt-boxes and split-level bathrooms, cosy cottages nestled into careful foliage allowed to grow just so wild and no wilder, rambling ranches designed from the same general all-purpose scheme for storing a standard quota of children in standard-sized boxes with a standard number of windows.

Mrs. Handiford, the real-estate saleswoman, efficient and motherly, graciously hauled us around winding tree-lined roads in her late-model battleship-on-wheels station wagon, pointing out local amenities and landmarks: stables here, swim club there, home of notable this and pillar of the community that.

"And of course the public school system is one of the finest in the state, although if you prefer private—"

"We haven't any children." Brenda was terse, bordering on rude, but Mrs. Handiford patted her neatly waved silver-gray coiffure and bravely pressed on.

"Ah, well, you're young and there's no place better for starting a family. I'm sure you'll find many activities here to interest you. There's the Arts and Crafts Guild. They have exhibits twice a year. And a very active chapter of the League of Women Voters. We have the Garden Club. They've done those very lovely plantings we saw in the village. Do you play bridge? We have several informal bridge groups, always looking for new members. Tennis and golf, of course. Oh, I'm sure you'll find lots to do, Mrs. Rollins."

"Yes. Well, I have a job. In the city." Brenda was obviously hating every minute of this grand tour of suburban glories.

Dammit, I thought. This was your idea. Let the poor woman get on with her spiel. And glared at her behind Mrs. Handiford's neat and business-like navy-blue back.

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Only momentarily dampened, Mrs. Handiford rallied swiftly and tried another tack.

"Well, if you're both going to be commuting, perhaps you'd like something closer to the station. I have a sweet little place, walking distance. Not much land, so it's easy to maintain."

The sweet little place near the station materialized as a Swiss chalet, replete with kitsch, cuckoo clock, and a grotto in the rear where recirculated water trickled over imitation moss on plastic rocks. Miraculously there were no gnomes. But I fully expected Shirley Temple as Heidi, or at the very least a nanny goat, to come bounding out of the garage-cum-cowshed exuding Alpine charm and the fragrance of edelweiss or emmenthaler, take your pick. A tour of the interior offered us eaves to bump our heads on, which Brenda did, bottle glass windows reducing the entrance of daylight to a minimum, low beamed ceilings, and endless square feet of dark and intricately carved woodwork.

Brenda was breathing hard by this time, not saying much. Just breathing. And nursing the bump on her head. It was the bathroom that really finished her off. She opened the door, quickly closed it, and tried to choke back a despairing "Oh, God, no!"

She was not to be let off so easily. Mrs. Handiford bustled through the door, taking Brenda's arm as she went. I followed in horrified fascination. There were the gnomes. Frolicking on the vinyl wallpaper, in a landscape featuring distant cows and Matterhorns.

"Of course, it's all custom-designed," stated Mrs. Handiford eyeing Brenda with grim satisfaction.

Indeed it was. The usual facilities were all encased in as much wood carving as possible without interfering with function. The tub-shower enclosure resembled a confessional box and the toilet paper roll, when activated, tinkled *The Sound of Music.*

Revenge must be sweet to real-estate ladies spending unprofitable Saturdays with obviously unsuitable clients.

"Sweet," gasped Brenda. "Utterly too sweet. But not my—" She broke off, headed for the front door at an ungainly gallop, and narrowly missed impaling herself on the staghorn doing duty as a coat rack in the tiny foyer.

Regrouped on the sidewalk, we all three tried to conceal our eagerness to split.

"We've seen so much. . .it's hard to decide."

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"It's been a pleasure taking you around."

"We'll have to think it all over."

"If something new comes in. . ."

"Yes, please do give us a call."

"I'll drive you to the station."

"Oh, thanks. We'd like to walk. It's so close."

"Goodbye then. If I can be of help, don't hesitate—"

"Thanks again. Yes, we can find the station."

"Goodbye."

"Good grief!" snorted Brenda as Mrs. Handiford piloted her dreadnaught off to whatever suburban utopia she called her own, which I devoutly hoped included a well-earned double Scotch on the rocks.

"You were right, Jack. Absolutely right. I could never hack this. Not in a million years. Where's that train schedule?"

By the time the train reached 125th Street, Brenda was enthusiastically discussing plans for the erection of a ten-foot-high solid redwood fence to take the place of the post and wire affair currently separating our turf from Guttierez'.

Back home again, the late Saturday afternoon Brooklyn streets basked in a golden glow. We bought Good Humors from Maxie outside the subway station and walked home munching and kicking prickle balls fallen from the huge old chestnut tree at the corner.

"It's okay, isn't it, Jack?" Brenda mouthed around a chunk of chocolate-chip ice cream.

"Sure it is," I replied from the midst of my toasted almond.

"I don't really want to leave," she went on. "And I'm sorry I made all those stupid phone calls. Maybe I should try to talk to Mrs. Guttierez."

"Maybe you should just leave the whole thing alone."

We let ourselves into the house, dim and cool and quiet. Quiet, except for the muffled sound of a radio voice—the unmistakeable voice of the WHOM announcer blasting out an Hispanic hard sell, exhorting his listeners to buy Vitarroz. Suddenly the penetrating commercial message was drowned, obliterated by a frantic frightened animal squealing. The squeals continued rising in pitch interrupted only by an inhuman snuffling, a snorting attempt to breathe. In the next moment this hair-raising noise was overridden by cheers and laughter, quite definitely arising from human throats.

"Jack, what's going on?"

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Brenda whispered. Her words were normal, but her eyes had gone unfocused as she listened intently. "It's them again. I know it. What are they doing?"

"Stay here, Bren. I think it's coming from the yard. I'll go take a look."

I strode off toward the back door, hoping Brenda would not follow. I didn't like the way she looked. Anything could set her off again.

The cheers and squeals had subsided, and WHOM had taken over with a burst of Latino music when I opened the door and stepped out into my garden. The first thing I saw was people. The neighboring yard was full of people. Young, old, and in-between, sitting on kitchen chairs and boxes, lying on blankets, leaning against the fence. One enormous old matriarch sat enthroned on a plastic-covered armchair. Guttierez was having a party.

All conversation stopped and thirty pairs of piercing black eyes turned full on me as I advanced to the center of my yard. Inquiry into the source of the frightful squealing was clearly unthinkable. A quick and furtive survey of Guttierez' yard disclosed a shallow trench filled with charcoal and a young man seated in a corner industriously whittling the end of a long wooden pole. The other end had already been shaped to a tapered point.

I turned to my rosebushes; Christian Dior was definitely drooping and I knelt for a closer look. Across the fence chatter and laughter resumed.

I didn't hear Brenda come out. I heard her gasp.

"My God! It's a pig!"

I turned. A pig it was. A small pig, not quite a suckling but not yet fully grown. I had missed it, lying under the hedge at the back of the yard, eyes closed and panting. A boy wandered over and began poking it with a stick. The pig gave a half-hearted squeal of protest, rose clumsily to its feet and trotted around the perimeter of the yard to escape its tormentor.

The boy trotted after the pig, and other children joined him. Several of the men rose and stationed themselves attentively around the yard. An anticipatory hush fell among the people; the radio was the only sound. The children stalked the pig; the men waited; we watched.

Guttierez marched out of his house, a gleaming, finely honed machete held lovingly in both hands. The waiting circle of guests tensed for the moment of truth. The children began to run. The pig scrabbled and galloped, turning to one side

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and then the other, seeking escape where there was none. And then the squealing began again.

The pig ricocheted off chair legs and people legs; the children shrieked and tumbled in the dust. The waiting stone-eyed man lunged and missed and lunged again. Guttierez stood motionless at the hub of the pig chase, the machete held ritually across his body. His moment would come. And rising above the shrieks and laughter of the children, the grunts and muttered comments of the men, the pig squealed its mortal terror.

In the corner of the yard the stake sharpener laid down his whittling knife. On light feet he moved, a thin sensitive-faced young man. Slowly and quietly, almost casually, he moved to a position some six feet behind the exhausted animal.

The pig stood at bay, its small wary eyes fixed on Guttierez and his shining blade. It did not sense the danger creeping up from behind. Suddenly the young man tensed, sprang, and soared across the intervening space. The full weight of his falling body flattened the protesting pig, splaying its slender dainty legs in four directions and cutting off its lament in mid-squeal.

A cheer rose from the spectators and the men and children crowded around the pair wrestling in the dusty arena. Guttierez flexed his sword arm and thumbed the edge of his blade. Two men struggled out of the writhing group on the ground, carrying the pig belly up. Its eyes rolled frantically as the men deposited it at Guttierez' feet, holding it immobile, throat exposed.

Guttierez imperiously motioned all others to stay behind him. The seated women drew in their feet and prepared to cover their eyes. The stroke, when it came, was almost anticlimactic. The machete swung upward, flashed once in the sun, and swung down. The hot pig blood spurted in a perfect arc and formed a puddle on the dried earth.

The women forgot to cover their eyes, but groaned instead in a kind of communal sensual satisfaction. The children capered around the carcass whose wound pumped a few smaller and smaller ribbons of blood, which finally subsided to a trickle. The smallest boy explored the puddle and squished his toes in the reddish mud.

The execution of the entire pigsticking must have taken no more than five minutes, but I felt as if I had been holding my

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breath for an hour. I sucked in a lungful of air, still heavy with the smell of fear and blood, and muttered to Brenda, "I wonder who's going to be awarded the pig's ear."

There was no reply. At some time during the slaughter Brenda must have fled indoors, unnoticed. I thought I'd better do the same.

I found her, tears streaming down her face, hysterically mouthing into the telephone.

". . . killing a pig. . . oh, God, the blood. . . all over the yard . . . come quick, he's got a machete."

I grabbed the phone from her hand and slammed it down.

"What have you done?" I demanded. "Not the police again?"

She was shaking uncontrollably, and now her head began a rhythmic nodding while the tears welled and splattered.

"Brenda. Brenda, they're having a barbecue. That's all it is. Brenda, snap out of it. Where do you think pork chops come from?"

I couldn't reach her. She would not be comforted. But while I was trying, thinking of calling a doctor, the sirens came. We stood at the center of a storm of sirens, more sirens than I thought existed coming from every direction. In moments the doorbell shrilled, fists pounded at the door, voices demanded that we open up.

I ran to the door and opened it to a surge of blue uniforms with guns drawn, emitting a staccato battery of questions.

"Where is it? Where's the body?"

"Next door? Which side?"

"Is he armed? Is he still there?"

"How many are there?"

"You reported the cop killing?"

"One side. Let us through."

Cop killing! I ran after them, trying to explain. They raced through the kitchen out into the yard.

"It was a pig! Only a pig!" I shouted after them. Brenda, in the kitchen, was trying to stop one of them, held onto his arm, and was swept out into the yard. I followed, still hoping to explain the colossal mistake.

In his yard Guttierez stood facing the pig now strung head down from a low-hanging ailanthus branch. The blood-streaked machete was still in his hand; he was preparing to disembowel. The charcoal in the trench was flaming and the double-pointed stake stood ready to impale its victim.

Scores of policemen were swarming into all the neighboring gardens up and down the block, vaulting the fences,

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converging on the big party. Cop killing is not taken lightly in this town.

Brenda had not loosened her grip on the arm of the law. She clung, and with her free arm pointed to the hung pig; she chattered, gasped, and shook. Her words tumbled out in an incoherent stream. The policeman looked stunned; all the policemen looked blank and chagrined, their drawn pistols hung superfluous and obscenely naked at their sides. They had come to do battle for a brother and found only a barbecue.

In that momentary hiatus before explanations and recriminations must be made, in the silence before the full weight of embarrassment descended, understanding came to Guttierez. And with it fury. It swelled his chest and added inches to his height. His narrowed eyes sought Brenda, and the fury erupted from his throat.

"A-a-y-y! *PIG!*" he screamed.

And the machete flashed in the sun once more. It left his hand in a graceful arc, crossed the fence and seemed suspended in the still evening air for endless ages before it came to rest.

At almost the same instant a policeman standing near Guttierez fired once. He later said he was aiming for the upswung arm but was too close and a split second too late. Guttierez lay beneath the hanging pig, the wreckage caused by a bullet in the brain mingling with the slow drip from the draining carcass.

Brenda sprawled at the foot of Christian Dior, the machete still quivering in her chest. The slowly spreading stain on her blouse matched the roses that drooped over her.

Somebody turned the radio off. And then the screaming began.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 402nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .a story told in a soft tone, but its softness, you'll find, is all on the surface. . .

The author, Joyce B. Chapman, is another inspiration to us all. At the time she wrote "The Vigil," she was 67 years old, "a happy wife, the proud mother of two sons, and the grandmother of three boys and one girl." You beginners who have not yet sold your first story—take heart!

Now retired, Mrs. Chapman has been a professional artist both in commercial advertising and library display work. She still paints, mostly landscapes, and her hobbies include reading and writing—although now, in her late sixties, she hopes that her writing will become more than a hobby. . .

THE VIGIL

by JOYCE S. CHAPMAN

The man in the dark abandoned warehouse shifted uneasily on the empty box seat. The warehouse was cold, damp, and smelled of decaying refuse in that sixth-floor corner. The October winds were brisk outside and found easy entry through the boarded-up glassless windows.

It had taken him a day to find a way into the building and then an evening to loosen the boards in the right window and set up a post to his satisfaction. Now he climbed the dangerous stairs every night between eight and nine, pulled the empty crate close to the opening in the boards, and commenced his vigil.

It wasn't comfortable. The angle through which he peered was sharp and only by leaning hard against the rotting framework and thrusting his head outward could he get a view into the particular window of the apartment across the alley. But he was content. It was all worth the effort. She was so beautiful and he hated her so.

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For weeks now he had watched her every evening, the anger in him building and building. What right had she to lie to him—telling him she didn't date anyone while her husband was overseas? He had acted decently and only talked to her when she was on a coffee break. He could have made excuses to bring extra bags to her checkout counter or asked the carry-out boy who packed for her to change places with him sometimes, but he didn't. He figured if he treated her in a dignified way and didn't rush her, she would eventually see how serious he was and give him a break. But no, she wouldn't even have lunch with him, saying she always ate with her girl friend.

Once he asked if he could drive her home in his old VW, but she made the excuse that she had to do some shopping and might even get her hair done afterwards, but he noticed her hair looked just the same the next day. So that was a lie, too.

It was after that night that he asked one of the other checkers where she lived and then drove around on Sunday afternoon. He found an old five-story apartment building overlooking a parking lot on one side and overlooked by the warehouse on the other. A quick reconnoiter of the musty lobby told him she lived in 5C.

A ticket over the superintendent's bell said *Apartment for Rent*, so he rang and asked to see the vacancy. Not that he wanted to move, but somehow he thought if he knew just which windows were hers he might feel better. If he should happen to drive by sometime he might see her looking out and he could imagine she was looking for him.

So he inspected the two-rooms-and-bath, dingy but clean, discovered that the C apartments were at the right rear of the building, and told the super he would think it over.

A walk to the rear as if checking parking facilities allowed him to locate her windows, and at the same time he noticed that the windows of the empty warehouse had a view of that side of the apartment.

For a while the significance of this did not impress him, but one night, after she had been especially cool when he had tried to talk to her as they prepared to leave the store, he suddenly realized the possibilities.

From that moment he had only one aim in life—to watch her every night and catch her in her lie about not dating. No girl

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as pretty as she and as young, too, was going to live like a nun just because her husband was in the army. Perhaps that was a lie, too. Anyway, he'd check her every move and he'd soon find out, and then—well, she'd better treat him right or else!

So he parked near the warehouse every night for a week until he knew just when the police car patrolled that block. Then he armed himself with a small crowbar and pulled his VW into the parking lot on the far side of the apartment. From there he could cross the back yard into the area behind the warehouse and be hidden between the crumbling loading docks.

After the first night of seeking possible places of entry he found one door which was already a little loosened. The necessity of working silently made the going slow, but eventually he succeeded in forcing the door.

When he realized he had finally accomplished his objective he felt almost sick with excitement and decided he'd had enough for that day and went home. The next morning started with one of his headaches and it was nearly a week before he felt well enough to return to the warehouse. He had managed to go to the supermarket each day in spite of the headache, but at night he could only fall into bed and sleep.

He wasn't really worried about his headaches. They came and went, and were perhaps a little worse than they used to be. But as long as no one knew about them and he could go to work it didn't matter.

The first night he took up his vigil, with a pair of binoculars he had bought, he was repaid for all his efforts. Though the angle of his viewing was oblique and downward he could see about half of the room in which she spent her nights. It was furnished with a daybed, a couple of small tables, and two easy chairs. He watched her sit down with a book or the evening paper after she had eaten in the other room, which was probably a kitchen outside of his range of vision.

Or she might turn on the little radio on the table beside the daybed and stretch out to listen and relax. Or she might write a letter—she seemed always to be writing, at least three or four times a week. Occasionally she read a letter she probably had picked up from the mailbox in the apartment lobby.

About ten o'clock she would get ready for bed. First she fixed the bed for sleeping and

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then she would disappear from his view for fifteen or twenty minutes. When she came back she'd have a robe on, her hair would be tied back with a ribbon, and her face cleaned of makeup. Some girls looked awful without their lipstick, but she still looked beautiful.

Just before she got into bed she would make her telephone call. The phone was on a little table beside the daybed in plain sight, and after a few nights he realized that she made this call every evening about the same time. He seldom saw her answer the phone or make a call at any other time. But this one she never failed to make. It was short and her back was toward him so he couldn't see her face, but he watched her nod or shake her head or shrug, and when she put down the phone she usually patted it and as she turned away he would see her smiling or perhaps frowning.

That phone call. He knew what it was all about. She had a boy friend after all and called him to say "good night" and perhaps "I love you." They were so careful about meeting that no one even guessed, but he had found them out. He knew now why she wouldn't give him a tumble. It wasn't any husband overseas that kept her from him but some bum at the other end of that phone wire. Well, he'd fix that. He'd ask her one more time for a date and if she turned him down again, he'd fix them both.

He did ask her again to let him drive her home and she said, "No, thanks," she was staying downtown to see a movie. Liar, he thought, and liar she had proved to be. From the warehouse window he saw her already in her robe when he took up his vigil. Movie?—why, she didn't even have a TV set! She had just come home as usual and now she was going to call that guy.

He shifted on the crate seat and reached behind him for the rifle he had stored away after he'd lost his job on the police force. In those days he'd been first in almost every sharpshooting competition and he knew he hadn't lost his light touch on the trigger. He would wait until she was making her phone call and then he'd let her have it and wouldn't that surprise the boy friend, too!

He rested the rifle on the window ledge. He had cleaned and polished it to perfection and it was loaded and ready. He looked over at her window again and his heart gave a sudden thud. She was making her call, perhaps earlier than usual, or maybe time had slipped by while he'd been thinking.

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He raised the rifle, placed the butt against his shoulder, and his cheek against the stock. Sighting along the slim barrel he exhaled slowly and curling his finger lovingly he gently squeezed the trigger.

She was more tired than usual tonight. The lines at the checkout counter had been longer because there was a two-for-one sale on canned beans, and it seemed as if every family in the neighborhood had developed a sudden craving for Boston's favorite food. Sales like that always attracted extra shoppers and once in the store they often filled up their carts. The few cents they saved on the free cans of beans were quickly absorbed in the higher price of a head of lettuce or of two pounds of ground chuck. Somehow they never learned, these avid bargain hunters.

She'd been the same way before she came to work at the Regal Supermarket. In that wonderful six months after they were first married she had shopped for bargains, too, hoping to stretch Frank's paycheck. Then when the army took him and he was eventually sent overseas she got a job so she could save his allotment for the day when he came home again.

The job wasn't really hard, only sometimes she got awfully tired of standing. The other girls were nice and the boys who packed for her were real polite. They knew she was an army wife and though they kidded with her the same as with the other girls they never went too far. The manager was a nice family-type older man and even the handyman who cleaned up when someone dropped a bottle of pickles in Aisle 7 or brought bags or fetched change when she ran short, even he wasn't too bad. He'd tried to date her at first but she'd told him about her husband being in the army and overseas and all he'd done since was ask to drive her home. She might have let him do that occasionally when she was real tired, but it might encourage him too much, and he did act a bit strange sometimes.

She'd been lucky to find this apartment, too. It was in a rundown section of town, but it was clean and the rent was fairly cheap. The superintendent and his wife were real nice, too. Once in a while they'd come up and visit and have a cup of coffee with her. They acted like parents sometimes, telling her she should dress more warmly when winter finally arrived, and scolding her for leaving her shades up at night. But why bother to pull

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down the shades when all there was outside was a boarded-up warehouse?

She was too high up for sidewalk Peeping Toms and the only inhabitants of the warehouse, a pack of rats, wouldn't be interested in what she might be doing. The window of her little dinette-kitchen faced the back of another apartment, so she did pull down that shade.

Tonight she would go to bed early. Usually she read or listened to the radio after supper, and every other night she wrote to Frank. But tonight neither the paperback she had started the night before nor the radio had any charm for her, and she'd written to Frank yesterday.

She washed the cup and one plate she had used for supper. She hadn't been hungry, so a pecan roll and coffee had been enough. Before getting into bed she'd have a glass of hot milk to make up and keep her from waking in the night.

She pulled the spread from the daybed, turned back the sheet, and took the pillow from its hiding place in the closet. In the tiny bathroom she undressed, bathed, put on her robe, tied back her hair with the blue ribbon, and creamed her face. A few minutes later with the milk heated, she returned to the living room. Another chore to be done—to lay out her clothes for the next day. That saved time when it was most precious, as she never seemed to have quite enough time in the mornings.

She set the glass of hot milk down on the table at one end of the daybed and picked up the phone. This was the last item in her evening routine before she kissed Frank's picture and put out the light. The phone calls began one night when the radio had blown a tube and she couldn't get the weather report to help her to decide whether or not to take her raincoat in the morning. She rather liked the voice of the woman at the other end of the line and began to call every night.

It had become a little game in which she added her comments to the daily forecast. Sometimes she nodded in agreement and other nights she took exception to the prediction of rain or fog. Then she would shake her head and say, "Bad guess! I'll bet you ten to one the sun shines all day!" And when the game was over she would thank the impersonal voice politely and give the receiver a little pat as she put it down.

So tonight she reached out her hand to pick up the phone—

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This is the 403rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .the story of an art auction—and why do auction stories, like stories about the members of private clubs and the occupants of railway compartments, seem to have an extra-special appeal? A very readable tale indeed!. . .

The author, Anthony Hand (a pseudonym), is in his late twenties, has lived most of his life in Canada, and doesn't remember when he didn't want to be a writer. He has been an editor, has written on sociological research, usually for the government, and has done a series of radio broadcasts in Canada on "The History of Childhood." His hobbies—rather, his "interests"—include the music of Ravel, the local history of Ottawa, the Great War, Arnold Bennett, and cats. Now, there's a potpourri of avocations!

But with the publication of this, his first story, we hope that Mr. Hand is launched on his true vocation—that of a professional writer. We look forward to his next story. . .

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

by ANTHONY HAND

Victor Cronsberry, the antique dealer, owned a small shop in a little street that ran behind Soho Square. It was not a fashionable location—his neighbors were a Chinese laundry and a cheap printer—and the façade of his store made no attempt to overcome this handicap. One of the front windows was cracked; both were covered with grime. The sign on the door read *CRON BERRY'S ANT Q ES*, and though the lettering was gold in color, it was certainly not gold-leaf.

But the drab appearance of his store didn't bother Victor, for he didn't depend on

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transient customers. The fact was, Victor really didn't enjoy *selling* anything; he was a *dealer*, and his store, if not quite a front, was only a base. Victor's true work lay elsewhere, within the small closed world of wealthy collectors, a world in which Victor was well known and had a special place.

He knew who was willing to sell what, who would likely want to buy it, and what a reasonable price might be. Victor was proud of this position, and usually styled himself "advisor" or "consultant." He had "clients" rather than "customers," was paid a "fee" rather than a "markup," and offered his services rather than goods—his knowledge, advice, and ingenuity.

The only product he might admit to *selling* was contentment. "A dealer," he always liked to say, "is one who brings buyer and seller together for their mutual satisfaction." And satisfaction, he would always add, is only assured "when the deal has something for everyone."

Today, Victor hoped, would see the consummation of just such an arrangment, and as he boarded the train at Waterloo he felt a certain distinct satisfaction with himself. The seller was eager, the buyer would surely become so, and Victor—well, Victor listened happily to the clicking of the rails until, two hours later, the train slowed to a stop at Maiden Fairey, in Wiltshire.

It was a small town, obviously declining, but Victor noted that it remained sufficiently rural for the auction to be something of an event. A flyer advertising it was prominently displayed on the station notice-board, and the address he gave the taxi driver was instantly recognized.

"The Fairey place. You'll be going to the auction, then?"

"That's right," replied Victor.

The driver nodded sadly. "Everyone here thinks it's terrible, selling off all those beautiful things. And you know, young Fairey's even going to sell the old house. Now I can remember a time—"

Victor, who had spent his life picking over failed fortunes, found nothing new in the story of the Faireys' decline, and barely listened. It was an old tale, and when the taxi finally reached the house, he saw there was no surprise twist to the ending. The property was enclosed by a fieldstone wall, many of whose stones were missing, and the house itself had settled to one side, like a listing ship. A noble ruin, he

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thought. "Lo, how the mighty have fallen."

As usual, the curious were flocking to witness the final agony. Cars were parked everywhere up and down the street—a white Triumph, Victor noted, was squeezed right up to a fire hydrant—and many cars had been left on the lawn. To Victor this seemed appropriately symbolic: the barbarians were at the gates, and through. With head slightly bowed, as though in reverence, he went up the drive to the house.

Inside a somber confusion reigned, as at a poorly organized funeral. No one was quite certain where to go and everyone felt mild embarrassment; no voice spoke above a whisper and eyes resolutely refused to meet. In his tatty old raincoat Victor easily faded into the crowd and began edging slowly by tables on which neatly numbered lots spoke their pathetic stories of generations past. *#82: Georgian candelabra. Set of two. #98: Globe. Mahogany base. #66: Fine china dinner set. 108 pces. Complete.*

He stopped for a second and examined a plate skeptically. An ugly pattern. Chip out of the butter dish. With a sniff he passed on, through the small salon, into the second sitting room, across to the library, his glance flicking over tables with a speed that undoubtedly belied his alertness. But there was really little of interest. "The bric-a-brac of the rich," he murmured, "but bric-a-brac just the same."

His tour ended in the *grand salon*, where the auction itself would take place and where the finer pieces were displayed: a crystal chandelier, the "best" silver, two excellent quilts, a table of leather-bound books. But Victor barely seemed to notice them. With a discreet though efficient use of his elbows he pushed through the crowd till he finally reached the corner of the room devoted to art. There was, naturally, a great deal of it: muddy family portraits, schooners at anchor, stags at bay, numerous bowls of fruit and flowers.

And there was also a small group of watercolors.

He gave them a quick cursory glance; then he moved on. But about ten minutes later, as though by accident, he'd worked his way back to them. He pursed his lips. Landscapes. Lakes with islands. In several, dark storms were building up in the background. Perhaps a little nervously he glanced quickly about him, and then, with a deft movement, worked loose the mat on one of the paintings

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so that he could examine the back of it.

After a few seconds he replaced the mat, immediately left the table, and assumed a position at the back of the room. Ever so slightly he rocked back and forth on his heels; ever so quickly the fingers of one hand drummed a little tune against his leg. But he looked straight ahead, apparently oblivious of anything but the milling throng—the old people with their memories and those legions who find nothing more exciting than an auctioneer rattling off the bids. Their comments buzzed round him.

"I swear I've never seen so many commodes in all my life!"

"If only her son had a little more spirit."

"Mmm. What do you think of the silver?"

"My dear, if only she'd had a different son altogether."

"The silver? I rather think it's what Sotheby's refused to take."

Then, for a second, the buzzing ceased as two men stepped into the room: one was elderly, dressed in a dignified gray suit, and the other was younger and more cheerfully attired—he sported a bright polka-dot tie. Victor immediately recognized the older man as an old-fashioned auctioneer: he would be scrupulously honest except when it came to recognizing the bid of a man he disliked. But then, suddenly, Victor was recognized himself. A tall gray figure elbowed himself between two people and said, "I'll be damned! Victor Cronsberry!"

Victor's face fell. Dealers do not like other dealers, and their relationships are usually marked by mutual suspicion. They are inevitable rivals, and even if the exigencies of a particular situation create the need for cooperation, that cooperation is always uneasy and often ends in betrayal. This was especially true with Chilton. Victor could recall a time—but no, it was hardly pleasant to recall that time. Rather stiffly he said, "So it's you, Chilton."

Chilton, perceiving Victor's evident consternation, smiled happily. "You look rather surprised to see me, old boy?"

Victor grunted. "I'd have thought you were off your usual circuit."

The crowd pushed round them, but both men held their ground. Chilton leaned toward Victor, who was thus given a powerful clue to Chilton's brand of tobacco.

Chilton said, "I could say the same about you, old boy. But I had a tip there might be something out here, so I

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decided to trot out. If there is anything, though, I'm afraid I haven't spotted it."

Chilton was a man of about 50. As usual, his expression was wary and alert, his watery glance skittering about him with the anxious anticipation of one who scans the sidewalk in front of him for coins dropped by passers-by. And perhaps he had seen something, for his eyes suddenly snapped into focus on Victor. "What about you? Seen anything yourself?"

Victor's lips tightened.

Chilton eyed him carefully. "Why, Victor," he said slyly, "I do believe you have."

"Damn you," Victor spluttered. "Of all the times—"

"Now, Victor," said Chilton soothingly, "be a little more friendly."

Victor glared at him. "You can bloody well find them yourself."

"Them?" Chilton raised his eyebrows. Then he smiled happily. "You know as well as I do that once you start bidding, everyone in the room will know what you're interested in."

Victor strained to get a grip on himself. "Chilton, I'll give you £100 not to bid against me—to mind your own bloody business."

A rasping vocal event took place deep in Chilton's throat, symbolic of a laugh. "Come, come, dear boy. If I don't know what you're interested in, I can hardly tell whether your offer's fair or not. Besides, you haven't any choice."

And what choice did Victor have? "Those watercolors," he finally muttered. "On the little table in the corner."

"Eh?" Chilton looked startled. "I already looked—"

"But did you notice the paper they're done on?"

Chilton looked doubtful. He hurried away. When he returned, there was a gleam in his eye and he was slightly breathless. "Wrapping paper. Watercolors on cheap wrapping paper. You think they're by David Cox?"

David Cox, 1783-1859, was the last major figure of the English watercolor school and is noted for his many works on coarse wrapping paper.

Victor laughed slightly. "Of course they are. Look at the subjects—those Welsh landscapes he was always painting."

Chilton's head tilted toward the ceiling, on which, it appeared, he was working out a calculation. How much would seven watercolors by David Cox fetch at Christie's? The answer, Victor knew, was about £2,000. He said, "Chilton, I repeat my offer. £100 to keep your blasted mouth shut when I start bidding."

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Chilton shook his head. "Of course, that would be a ridiculous sum—*if* I could take your money."

"If?" queried Victor. One did not normally associate the conditional with Chilton's attitude toward taking other people's money.

Chilton looked down at the floor. "Mmm," he said. "But it wouldn't be fair, unless you were willing to buy off someone else as well. You see, not ten minutes ago I was talking to Bill Leider out in the hall."

Chilton made this announcement with obvious satisfaction —which was confirmed by Victor's surprised look. "Bill Leider," he muttered.

"None other." Chilton cleared his throat and cocked his head to one side. "We exchanged a few words. Your name came up, as a matter of fact. I gathered you owe him a spot of money."

Victor tried to speak with dignity. "Indeed. And I'd be willing to pay him back, provided he dropped this idiotic business about interest. Do you know that? He wants to charge me interest!"

Chilton was about to say something—perhaps a remark to the effect that most loans do bear interest—but he never got it out. A large pink-faced man was pushing through the crowd, making a beeline for Victor. "Cronsberry! You debt-dodging—"

But then Bill Leider saw Chilton, which seemed to take him slightly aback and deflect him from his original purpose. He managed to get a polite smile on his face, and his manner became suddenly hearty. "Well, well. Chilton and Cronsberry jawing together. Do I smell a conspiracy to violate the Public Sales and Auctions Act?"

This remark, intended to provoke amusement, was met with stony silence. Victor looked at Chilton. Chilton looked at Victor. Chilton coughed. "Keep your voice down, you silly ass," he muttered to Leider.

"Eh?"

Victor gave Leider a long meaningful glance and then focused his eyes ten feet beyond Leider's head. In a low voice he said, "Perhaps it's rather coincidental, but under the circumstances I think a conspiracy of just the sort you suggest might be in order."

Leider looked astonished. "You don't mean you've actually found something worth bidding on?"

Quickly Chilton directed him to the table with the paintings. In a few moments he

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was back. "You're right. It *is* Cox paper. And when you look at them closely you can see they're pretty decent."

Chilton nodded, then whispered, "Gentlemen, do we have a deal?"

Leider nodded.

"Satisfactory," muttered Victor, though rather grimly.

Chilton smiled. "Good for you, dear chap. One likes to have everything, but a third of a loaf is better than none."

Indeed. And perhaps their arrangement was as old as a proverb. Bidding against each other would only drive the price up and benefit the Faireys; the eventual high bidder would have the paintings, but little profit. In such situations the profit motive and survival instinct are clearly joined: competition threatens everyone, therefore cooperation is possible. Perhaps it isn't fair play, but if you're playing to win...

Victor, Chilton, and Leider stood together and quietly surveyed those who were playing for the love of the game. After a moment Victor looked at his watch. There were only a few more minutes before the auction was scheduled to start. He looked up. "Yes," he murmured, "yes."

"What's that?" whispered Chilton.

"A problem, I'm afraid. You see that young fellow there? The one with the polka-dot tie? Yes. You see? He's going over for a last look at the paintings. I'm sure he's a collector—and I think he's spotted them."

Leider grunted unhappily. "Well, that spikes us pretty effectively. If we start bidding against him, the whole place will know we're onto something."

"Yes," said Victor, "but I think we're in luck. I happened to be right behind him when he arrived. The street was terribly crowded, and I noticed he parked right in front of a fire hydrant. He was driving a little white sports car. Now if one of us—let's say you, Bill—were to hand the auctioneer a note a little before our lot came up—'

"Ah, yes," said Chilton. "The police request that the automobile bearing license number—"

"Exactly," said Victor. "The problem is the timing. No one minds having their car towed away if they're just about to make a few thousand quid. So he has to think there's enough time for him to come back in—except, when he tries to, the door will be locked." He looked up at Leider. "Agreed?"

"All right," Leider said, nodding. Then, lightly, he touched Victor's arm. "By the

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way, no matter how this works out, you'll be getting some money. I expect to see one hundred and twenty—"

"One hundred. One hundred pounds and not a penny—"

The rap of the auctioneer's gavel silenced them.

The auction began, and proceeded in a completely predictable way, small objects going for small sums. Victor waited patiently at the back of the room, Chilton beside him. Neither, under the circumstances, bothered bidding on any of the other items; the "ring" they had formed was difficult to detect, but they agreed there was no reason to make themselves conspicuous.

As lot #109 was called, Victor nodded silently and Bill Leider, who had gone to the other side of the room, slipped through the doorway.

At lot #113 he was back, a folded piece of paper in his hand. He passed it to another man and whispered in his ear. The second man nodded, wormed through the crowd, then tugged at the auctioneer's elbow. For a moment the old gentleman studied the note. Then he cleared his throat loudly.

"I've just been informed that there is a police constable outside who must ask the owner of a white Triumph car, license number MNA 9841, to move it immediately, as it is parked in front of a fire hydrant. If it is not moved at once, it will be towed off at the owner's expense."

There was a slight stirring in the crowd. Victor and Chilton turned toward the man with the polka-dot tie who seemed, for a moment, undecided. "Trying to think if he can get back in time," muttered Victor. Apparently, the young gentleman decided this question in the affirmative, for in a second he left.

Chilton whispered, "Now it's all up to Bill."

Lot Numbers 114, 115, 116, and 117 seemed to take hours; in fact, they were dealt with quite quickly. But just as lot #118 was called, a dull pounding sound began at the front of the house.

"You were right," whispered Chilton. "He *had* spotted them. He wants to get back in."

Victor didn't acknowledge this remark, but looked straight ahead at the auctioneer as the pounding grew slightly louder. The crowd stirred, heads bowed together and whispered. The auctioneer frowned and raised his voice. "We now come to lot Number 118. This consists of seven watercolor paintings, three in period frames, by an unknown artist who may have

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been a member of the Fairey family in the early part of last century. They are well executed, quite charming, and undoubtedly possess much local historical interest." No man could have done more to describe them, but it was no use; he was forced to mutter, "Let the bidding begin at one pound."

It almost ended there, too. Only after quite a long pause did someone bid a pound. Then Victor went to thirty shillings and the auctioneer's energy managed to extort £2 from someone else. But Victor's bid of two pounds ten met no challengers. The auctioneer chanted: "Two pounds ten shillings going once, twice, thrice—and sold (bang went the gavel) to the gentleman in the back of the room. You may pay me now or within one hour of last bid."

Just as Victor paid and picked up the paintings, the man in the polka-dot tie came back in, panting and looking rather red in the face.

"Let us leave," Chilton whispered, "by the other door."

They slipped out quickly and found Leider at the front of the house. After a brief moment of self-congratulation they walked to a nearby pub, where they found a table and ordered beer. Discreetly, Victor kept the paintings under his coat, and when he spoke, his voice was low.

"If there are no objections," he said, "I suggest that I now play auctioneer." Leider and Chilton nodded. "Good, then. Usual terms, I think. Minimum increased bid ten pounds, and payment in cash." The others nodded again. Chilton rasped nervously and worked his hands together.

"All right," said Victor, "bidding starts at £400."

Leider grunted. "Why waste time? I'll bid five."

"Five-fifty," said Victor.

"And fifty," whispered Chilton.

"The hell. Seven hundred."

At £800 the bidding slowed somewhat, only rising in £20 jumps. Victor himself bid in at £840 and £900. Then there was a brief pause.

Victor watched carefully as Bill Leider lit a cigarette and Chilton noisily swallowed beer. "Getting a little tight, gentlemen?" he asked.

Leider smiled. "There is the cash problem, of course." But then he said, "Nine ten."

"Twenty," said Chilton.

"And thirty," said Victor quickly.

Chilton pushed himself away from the table as though he was going to get up; but then he

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rocked forward again. Leider's glance flickered to Victor, who now felt a thin film of perspiration on his forehead. Victor licked his lips very slowly. Leider looked at him a little quizzically, but then said, "Nine hundred and forty pounds."

There was silence. The sensation of heat under Victor's arms grew quite intense. "Going once," he said, "twice—" But then he himself blurted, "Nine hundred and fifty pounds!"

Chilton leaned forward on his elbow. A look of intense concentration appeared on his face. Very slowly he said, "One thousand pounds."

The heat that had suffused Victor's body made him feel he was in a forge. He leaned back. "I'm out, I'm afraid." He looked over at Leider. "What about you?"

Leider shrugged. "I really didn't come prepared for this sort of thing." He turned to Chilton and made a gesture with his hands. "They're yours, old boy. Lucky fellow. You should double your money."

Chilton made a small sound of satisfaction. Victor handed the paintings across to him, and Chilton reached for his wallet. "I believe I owe each of you gentlemen £500."

Victor cleared his throat. "And there is also the question of my expenses for our mutual investment," he said, meaning the money he'd bid for the paintings. "A pound five shillings from each of you."

Leider gave him a bland, artificial smile. "Perhaps I'll hang onto that," he said. "A small payment on account."

Victor pointedly looked away, but he was careful, as Chilton counted out the money onto the table, to keep one hand on his pile, as though expecting Leider to confiscate another payment. When Chilton finished, Victor quickly stuffed his money into his pocket. He smiled with satisfaction. "An excellent, reasonable arrangement all around."

"Yes," said Leider, "I agree. It's rather like borrowing money. I permit you the use of my funds, and, in return, you pay me—"

Victor stopped him with a withering look. "If we must talk about that, let us wait till we can do so in private."

Chilton gave Leider a friendly wink. "Don't mind me," he said. "I'm just going."

There were brief protests at this, but Chilton persisted. As he got up, Victor and Leider exchanged wooden glances and as the door closed behind him, both smiled.

Then grinned.

Then started laughing.

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"By God," said Leider, "we did it!"

"Got him!" said Victor. "Got him *cold!*"

A strange look of intense, rapturous pleasure glowed on his face.

With a grin Leider shook his head. "I thought you were crazy. You pushed him so hard—making me bid £940, then going to £950 yourself! You were mad!"

Victor was still feeling warm, but now only comfortably so. "To tell you the truth, I thought I'd be stuck with them. But he dislikes me so much, the old fool, and he's never one to pass up a bargain."

Just then the door of the pub opened and a young, anxious-looking man in a polka-dot tie appeared. "Ah," said Victor, "young Mr. Fairey."

"Well done," said Leider, as Fairey came up to the table, "you played your part perfectly. You were the last convincing touch."

"I hope I made enough noise," said the young man. "I didn't want to pound too hard in case someone actually opened the door."

Victor leaned back with satisfaction. "I rather think," he said, "that you struck just the right note."

The young man smiled diffidently, then nervously glanced down at the table. After a moment he cleared his throat and looked up.

"How much did we get?" he asked.

Victor looked sharply at Bill Leider. "Quite good," he said. "£900. We might have got a bit higher, you know, but we had to make sure that he ended up with the paintings—and we ended up with his money."

Mr. Fairey nodded, apparently content. "As I understand it, £900 means that each of us gets—"

"We split three ways." Carefully Victor counted some of Chilton's cash into the young man's trembling hands. Then, deftly, he extracted £10. He smiled. "I had to pay a chap for the paintings, you see."

Mr. Fairey seemed much too relieved to object. He suddenly smiled. "You don't know how much this £290 means to me. All the money from the auction just goes for the estate's debts, not my personal ones."

Victor grunted with pleasure. "Satisfactory," he said. "That's just the way I like it. You, Mr. Fairey, are pulled out of difficult circumstances, my friend here has a debt repaid, with interest, and even I am given a small reward for my efforts. You see? Something for everyone."

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

The cards must be played as they are dealt, leaving your mentor in his far from unusual dilemma of not knowing whether to laugh or swear. Our whole theme this month is biography, from the fancied to the real.

"Fancied" biography? Well, yes. All four books are for lovers of blood and thunder. Since preliminary remarks may only confuse, let's get down to the dirty work at once. *Arma fabulamque cano;* you'll soon understand.

If we begin with *James Bond, the Authorized Biography of 007*, by John Pearson (Morrow, $7.95), that's fair warning. And its publishers have been equally fair. Despite the contention that Ian Fleming's celebrated James Bond is very much a real secret agent on the international scene, this work has been subtitled "a fictional biography"; accept as much or as little as your own credulity may direct.

It's a fascinating chronicle. As presented by Mr. Pearson, our protagonist whirls through adventures fully as sensational as any ever dreamed by the late Mr. Fleming. All-conquering James—always James; not even his mistresses ever endanger dignity by calling him Jim—remains aloof and imperturbable whether he is cutting cards, cutting capers, or cutting throats.

The women remain cooperative, the plotters ever devious when as Bond's substitute we foil villainy through city after city, amid luxury to cushion menace and please the Walter Mitty in us all. Except for traitors, crooked gamblers, or the misguided K.G.B., it's top of the tree, top of the morning, top of the world.

Some biographers have seemed uncertain regarding the whereabouts of Edgar Allan Poe from January to May 1844. Plausibly disarming, *A Singular Conspiracy*, by Barry Perowne (Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95), takes the hiatus as its premise for this colorful fantasy of an unrecorded chapter in Poe's life.

Let's accept the premise: he goes abroad. Assuming the name and identity of a wealthy young Southerner whom accident has

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left dead or dying on the New York waterfront, he heads for Paris to seek a commission in the Polish army during Poland's war with Russia. He finds no military glory, but he finds friends everywhere. Assisted by various literary men—including drug-ridden Charles Baudelaire, poet of evil—he precipitates a resounding domestic broil, a duel with stern old General Aupick, and a bloodless hoax whose outcome would have delighted him.

All ends well, even when the real Southern planter turns up to claim that fetching English girl. Turning towards home, wife, and mother-in-law, our own master of fantasy leaves behind, as one more fact to end noble romanticizing, harassed Charles Baudelaire translating Poe's works into French. If the adventure itself never happened, Mr. Perowne's ingenuity has supplied all needs.

And now for authentic biography in paperback print.

The Worlds of Chippy Patterson, by Arthur H. Lewis (Pocket Books, $1.25), through journalistic eyes studies a much-admired social phenomenon—the brilliant, erratic lawyer who sways juries to his will.

For Christopher Stuart Patterson, Jr. (1875-1933) there were three worlds: that of the wealthy, aristocratic family into which he had been born; that of the criminal courts at Philadelphia's City Hall; that of his own mind and heart, much harder to define.

"Chippy" (sometimes "Chiffy") Patterson soon defied convention. Charm and passion he brought to the defense of any who consulted him, particularly the anti-respectable; nor had he any concern for his fee. At his best in a murder trial, he scored a dazzling record of acquittals and mild sentences, seldom losing a client to the chair.

Careless, unbuttoned Chippy Patterson both worked hard and played hard until a heart attack snatched him from the arms of his latest girl-friend before any alloted span of years. There is no need to point a moral; this story rears its own monument.

Probing many ill reputations in Renaissance Italy, Maria Bellonci's *The Life and Times of Lucrezia Borgia* (Pyramid, $1.50) features the fair-haired, much-married beauty, daughter of Pope Alexander VI and sister of the murderous Cesare Borgia, who survived both as Duchess of Ferrara. She herself must be found guiltless; if she knew of crime and treachery, she had no choice but to remain silent. Here move human beings in a glittering pageant which is also sound history; with so much steel or poison, let's avoid a vicious heroine when we can.

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a *NEW* Schlock Homesdunit by

ROBERT L. FISH

Once again the game is afoot, and Schlock Homes, The Master Detective, walks in relentless pursuit of archvillains and secret agents. Secret indeed! Two of them followed Homes and Watney like shadows, leaving their footprints in the otherwise unblemished snow; but close as the prints were to our hero and his worshiper—close enough for the criminals to be apprehended—even the brilliant, analytical Homes could not catch the nefarious pursuers. And that, dear readers, takes some doing! . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

by ROBERT L. FISH

It was rare, indeed, for my good friend Mr. Schlock Homes and myself to disagree as to the merits of his ability in resolving a case, yet such a situation arose in regard to an affair which I find reference to in my notebook as *The Adventure of the Great Train Robbery*. In my estimation, the case allowed Homes as great a use of his exceptional powers as any I can recall, but the fact was that Homes himself was far from satisfied with his performance in the matter. I can but leave it to the reader to judge for himself.

It was upon a Wednesday, February 31st, that we first heard of Sir Lionel Train. Homes had been exceptionally busy those early months of '68, first with the problem of the championship kittens stolen just hours prior to an international show, a case I find referred to as *The Adventure of the Purloined Litter*, following which my friend went on to resolve the curious puzzle of a punch-drunk prize-fighter, a

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case I later chronicled as *The Adventure of the Rapped Expression.* It was not, therefore, until the final day of February that the matter of Sir Lionel came to our attention.

This particular Wednesday the weather had turned quite poor, with a night of fierce snow followed by dismal skies and a sharp drop in temperature. Homes, therefore, had given the day over to relaxation and was bent over his laboratory bench with me in sharp attendance, studying some putty-like material called "Plastique" he had received without comment just that morning from his old friend M'sieu C. Septembre Duping, in Paris. We had already noted its colour and odour, as well as its rubber-like consistency, and Homes was about to strike it with a hammer to test the resilience of the strange material, when there came a sudden disturbance on the stairway, and a moment later Homes's brother Criscroft had burst in upon our scientific experiments.

It was extremely odd for Criscroft to appear at our quarters at 221 B Bagel Street without prior notice, and even more unusual to see that normally most controlled of gentlemen gasping for breath. His clothing was awry, his gaiters unbuckled, and there was an air of urgency about him which communicated itself at once to Homes's razor-sharp instincts. Homes immediately replaced the putty-like substance in its wrapping, returned the hammer to its proper place in the tool rack, washed and dried his hands carefully, and, wasting no time, faced his brother.

"Well, Criscroft," said he, lighting a Vulgarian, "this is indeed a pleasure! But you appear disturbed—or have I misinterpreted the signs?"

Criscroft fell into a chair, still fighting for his composure.

"As usual you are correct, Schlock!" he exclaimed. "We may well be in deep trouble, indeed! I fear some grave misfortune may have befallen Sir Lionel Train."

Homes nodded in instant understanding. "Who?" he inquired.

"Sir Lionel Train, head of Q6-JB45-VX-2DD-T3, the most secret of our secret services. Other than the Yard and Special Services, no one has ever heard of the man."

"Ah! *That* Sir Lionel Train!" Homes said, and nodded. "Pray favour us with the details."

"Very well," Criscroft said. He sat a bit more erect, obviously relieved to have his brother's aid with the dire problem. "Well, then, the facts are these! Sir Lionel has his country estate

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at Much-Binding-in-the-Groyne, a typical English village near Tydin, Notts, where he spends his mid-weeks with his famous diamond collection. In any event, early this morning a neighbour of his, out to check the weather, happened to notice Sir Lionel struggling in hand-to-hand combat with an assailant in his bedroom. Not wishing to be hasty, this neighbour returned to his house and took up a pair of binoculars, with which he verified the sight he had seen. Satisfied he had not been incorrect—for through the binoculars he could see this unrecognizable assailant's hands around Sir Lionel's neck—he immediately sent his butler off to Scotland Yard with the information."

"He did not interfere directly?"

"Of course not. They had never been introduced."

"I understand. But he continued to watch?"

"He had come out without his slippers. No, once his butler had been sent off, this neighbour repaired to his basement, where he is building a bottle-in-a-ship."

"I see. And Scotland Yard—?"

"Aware of Sir Lionel's true status, the Yard instantly communicated with the Home Office, who in turn sent a messenger to advise me. When my man could not locate a cab, I hastily dressed and ran all the way. Schlock, you must go to Much-Binding-in-the-Groyne immediately and do everything in your power to save Sir Lionel!"

Homes considered his brother steadily behind tented fingers.

"At what hour did this neighbour note Sir Lionel struggling?"

"A bit before seven this morning."

"It is just after noontime. It is possible, of course, that I may arrive too late. However, we can but try. Tell me, where was Lady Train during all this?"

"Lady Train is visiting relatives."

"Sir Lionel has no staff?"

"Just a new maid he employed only yesterday, right after Lady Train left. Sir Lionel has an aversion to butlers."

"I see. But regarding your fears, surely Sir Lionel does not keep State secrets in his country home?"

Criscroft shook his head decisively.

"Sir Lionel commits nothing to paper. Still, under the duress of torture, who knows what secrets he might divulge?" Criscroft came to his feet. "It is in your hands, Schlock," he said. With an abrupt nod in our direction he stepped on a gaiter

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buckle and stumbled heavily down the stairs.

"Ah, well, Watney," said Homes with a sigh, "a pity our afternoon is to be compromised. They are playing the Hayden Go Seek concerto at Albert Hall and I had hoped to attend. However, duty before pleasure. You might bring along your medical bag, as it seems it might be useful. And you might also bring along Duping's gift. Studying it might help us while away an hour or so on the train."

The Nottingham Express dropped us off in Tydin, and a rented trap was easily arranged with the station-master. He also furnished us with directions to Sir Lionel's estate, and moments later we were driving smartly along the newly-cleared road to Much-Binding-in-the-Groyne.

Here in Nottinghamshire the sun had wormed its way through the heavy overcast, a blanket of glistening snow stretched across the endless fields, and ice glittered on wires that hung between each house and a line of poles inexplicably planted in a row along the highway. Had our mission not been of such serious intent, we might well have enjoyed the brisk air and lovely scenery.

Sir Lionel's home lay around a curve beyond the quaint village. We passed the village green, crossed a small burn lightly crusted with ice, and slowed down as we approached the house. I was about to direct our trap down the carriage-way when Homes suddenly placed a hand upon my arm. I pulled our panting horse to a stop and looked at my friend inquiringly.

"From here on it would be best if we proceeded by foot," said he, his eyes sparkling with the excitement of the chase. "Note the unbroken expanse of snow. It would not do to disturb it without first seeing if it can answer any of our questions."

"True," I admitted, and looked about for a weight to throw down, but it seems our station-master had overlooked putting one into the carriage. Homes noted my search and shook his head.

"Block the wheels with Duping's package," said he impatiently. "Time may be of the essence."

Shamed at not having thought of the simple solution myself, I dropped from the trap, propped the wheel against the horse's wandering, and turned to Homes, medical bag in hand. But Homes's attention was already directed towards the smooth snow that stretched on all sides of the manor house.

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A frown appeared on my friend's lean face, to be replaced almost at once by a look of determination.

"Come!" said he, and started off on a large circuit of the grounds with me close upon his heels. The snow lay unblemished in all directions. We passed the stables at the rear and the coach-house to one side, and at last came about our huge circle to our starting point. Suddenly my companion froze in his tracks.

"Homes!" I cried in alarm, since the temperature was not that low. "What is it?"

"Later," said he fiercely, and dropped to one knee to study intently two pairs of footprints beside our trap which I swear had not been there upon our arrival. I waited in silence as my companion checked them thoroughly, and then watched as he slowly rose to his feet with a frown, brushing the snow from his trousers.

"Two men," said he slowly. "One tall and thin, and from the angle of his prints, of rather intense nature. The other is short and walks with a slight limp. I should say without a doubt that the shorter of the two is a medical man by profession, and a bit absent-minded in the bargain."

"Really, Homes!" I exclaimed reproachfully. "I can understand that you might arrive at the relative heights of the men by the lengths of their stride, but surely you are pulling my leg when you claim one of them to be a medical man—and an absent-minded one, at that!"

"At times I wonder at you, Watney," said Homes impatiently. "You have forgotten that today is Wednesday, the traditional day for doctors to leave their practise to their nurse and take to the open air. You have also failed to properly examine the tracks this man left; had you done so you would have noted that the shorter of the two is wearing golfing shoes. Since the snow is too deep for playing the game, one can only assume he put them on automatically before leaving the house, an action which not only clearly indicates his absent-mindedness, but also serves as further proof of his profession, since on Wednesdays doctors don them from force of habit."

"He might have been a dentist," I hazarded a bit sullenly, although in truth I did not doubt the accuracy of Homes's masterful analysis.

"No, Watney," said he. "Dentists, from constant standing, develop much larger feet. But we are wasting time. The two men undoubtedly passed as

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we were in the rear near the stables. However, since their spoor does not approach the house, it is evident they have gone off about their business and have nothing to do with the case. Come!"

He turned and moved off towards the house, breaking trail through the snow, while I followed as quickly as my shorter legs would permit. A moment later and Homes was stamping the loose snow from his boots on the porch, while examining the lock on the main door with narrowed eyes.

"Homes!" I exclaimed as a sudden thought struck me. "I should have also brought my revolver! Surely if there are no footprints in the snow, the assailant must still be within the house, for there is no other exit."

"You forget the overhead wires leading to those poles in the road," he said, reaching into his pocket for his set of picklocks. "They have obviously been placed on each house to afford an auxiliary means of exit from the upper stories in case of emergencies; otherwise what purpose would be served by the spikes in the poles, forming a ladder? No, Watney, our assailant would have no problem leaving the house without leaving footprints, especially if he were small."

I nodded in admiration for Homes's analysis, and then followed my friend into the silent house as the door quickly succumbed to the magic of his touch. We made our way through the main hall and up the steps of the grand stairway. At its head an open door leading to the library revealed a large safe standing ajar. Homes shook his head pityingly.

"Had the miscreant known, as we do, that Sir Lionel commits nothing to paper, he might have saved himself the trouble of struggling with that heavy safe," said he. "But let us continue our search."

We moved from the library, making our way along the balcony that fronted the floor below across an ornate railing. As we reached the corner, a sudden guttural sound brought us up short, and a moment later Homes was dashing down a hallway in the direction of the strangled noises. I followed in all haste, my medical bag banging against my thigh. Homes threw open a door and paused abruptly.

"It is Sir Lionel himself!" he said, turning to me. "Pray God we are not too late. It is in your hands now, Watney."

I hastened to the side of the bed and bent over the man. He lay on his back, one arm dangling helplessly over the side of

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the large mussed bed. Sir Lionel was wearing his pajama bottoms, but his chest was bare and even as I watched, it rose and fell, accompanied by his stentorian breathing.

"Homes," I said in a low voice. "The poor man has been badly treated, indeed. Note the scratches on his shoulders; note the puckered red blotches on his cheeks and lips; smell the sweet odour, similar to Chanel Number Five, doubtless one of the new perfumed anaesthetics."

"But he put up a brave struggle from the appearance of the bedclothes," Homes commented.

"Which probably saved his life," said I, and reached down and shook the man gently. "Sir Lionel!"

"Not right now, darling," he muttered, and opened his eyes sleepily. They widened incredulously at sight of my face. "Eh, what? Who? What, what? What? Who? What, what?" He turned and saw my companion. "Schlock Homes! How much did my wife pay—"

"The poor chap is completely incoherent, Homes," said I, and plunged the needle of my hypodermic into his bare arm. "The shock of sudden rescue often does this to people."

Sir Lionel's head fell back onto the pillow. I pulled his arm up to fold it across his chest and then paused.

"Homes!" I ejaculated.

"Yes?" said he.

"Look here," I said, and pointed to a tattoo that ran across the biceps, and which had been revealed as I drew up his arm. "What do you make of this?"

Homes moved swiftly to my side and read the tattoo over my shoulder.

" 'Left 36, Right 21, Left twice to 15, Right 9'." My friend straightened up, staring at the mysterious symbols with a bitter look in his eyes. "Criscroft stated that Sir Lionel never committed secrets to paper, but he said nothing of a tattoo!"

"But surely those numbers can have but little significance, Homes," I said, hoping to soothe him. "They are probably merely the result of a boyish prank from his University days."

"I doubt it is that simple," Homes replied heavily. "They are obviously references to the political left and right. Undoubtedly the numbers delineate the code name of our secret agents in certain countries of both persuasions." He shook his head. "Come, Watney. If Sir Lionel is settled for the moment, let us continue our search of the house for more clues."

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I hastily tucked a cover to Sir Lionel's chin and followed Homes as he moved from the room. Our search was more thorough this time, starting in the cellars, including the kitchens, and returning to the upper stories. At the far end of the final corridor we came upon narrow steps leading to the attic rooms, and Homes took them evenly, with me upon his heels.

At the top a small landing beneath the eaves revealed a door set between dormers and partially open. Homes peered cautiously around the jamb and then stepped swiftly back, drawing me into the shadows. From my new vantage point I could see into the room; a young lady was bending over a small attaché-case, tucking a chamois bag into its depths. Homes gripped my arm painfully.

"Do you see that young lady?" he demanded in a taut whisper. "That, Watney, is none other than Miss Irene Addled, international jewel thief, and the only woman who ever bested me! And yet, see to what sad end she has come. Despite the proceeds of years of crime, see where she has ended—a maid of all work in a small country manor house! There is a lesson here for all of us, I am sure, but unfortunately, there is no time to explore it. Come!"

He pushed his way into the small room. The young lady looked up from closing her small case and then shrank back against the wall, aghast at sight of my companion.

"Mr. Schlock Homes!" she cried in terror. "What are you doing here?"

"It is all right, Miss Addled," Homes said gallantly. "I am not here in respect to you, nor am I one to bear a grudge, especially against one upon whom evil days have so obviously fallen. Still, I fear I have some bad news for you. Your master has been viciously attacked. However, thanks to Dr. Watney, he is resting comfortably. I suggest you go down and sit by his bedside. It will comfort him to see a friendly face upon awakening."

"And then may I leave?"

"As soon as the ambulance arrives. Dr. Watney and I shall go for one at once. I realize this means the end of your newfound employment, but if you stop by our quarters I shall do my best to see if I can arrange suitable employment in some other ménage."

"Some day, somehow, I shall find some means of thanking you!" she cried, and flung her arms about his neck, still holding her attaché-case. Homes reeled back, blushing, while Miss Addled hurried down the

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steps. Homes and I followed and watched as the thankful young lady moved towards the master bedroom with a remarkable sense of direction considering her few hours in the house. With the matter settled, Homes and I descended the main staircase and walked out onto the porch. Suddenly Homes stopped so abruptly that I ran into him from behind.

"Homes!" I said in a muffled voice. "What is it?"

"I am a fool!" he cried.

"But why?" I insisted.

His thin finger pointed dramatically. "We have been followed!"

I came from behind him and stared. It was true! The same two sets of footprints that had so mysteriously appeared beside our trap were now facing us again, leading directly to the house. There was no mistaking the long stride of the taller man, nor the spike-marks of the shorter.

"I am an idiot!" Homes cried. "I should have realized the only reason Sir Lionel was left alive was precisely because he had *not* revealed the secret of that tattoo, despite the terrible torture. Obviously, the smaller man left the house by means of the overhead wires for the purpose of bringing an accomplice, a larger person to exert greater pressure on Sir Lionel. And, locating the accomplice, the two returned to the house."

"But where are they now, Homes?" I cried.

"Obviously, they heard our sounds of search and have gone away. But these footprints are still quite fresh, Watney! They cannot have gotten very far. Come! After them!"

With a bound from the porch we dashed through the snow to our trap and scrambled inside, not even wasting time to unblock the wheels. I cracked the whip close beside our horse's ear, and with a convulsive leap he sprang forward. My last conscious memory as we rose in the air under the force of an explosion was of Homes's voice tinged with a bitterness I had seldom heard before.

"I am a *double* fool!" he cried. "Allowing them to booby-trap us!"

It was several weeks before we were released from St. Barts and allowed to return to the ministrations of Mrs. Essex. Sir Lionel Train, obviously unnerved by events, had gone off to the continent on a protracted holiday with a young nurse, and we had had no word from poor Miss Addled. But despite what I consider one of Homes's most brilliant successes, he continued to consider

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it a failure, and to brood heavily upon it.

"Look, Homes," I said at breakfast the first day we were able to be up and about, "after all, Sir Lionel suffered no permanent harm, and that was your major assignment. Nor was the secret of the code numbers ever revealed, since the explosion apparently frightened the villains away. And as for poor Miss Addled, I am sure your paths will cross again one day. So how can you possibly consider this case a failure?"

"You do not understand, Watney," said he bitterly, reaching for a curried curry. "It is the fact that we had those nefarious criminals within our grasp and allowed them to escape! And not only to escape, but to hamper our pursuit by planting an explosive practically under our noses. How does one live down an insult of such dimensions? How, in addition, does one advise an old friend like M'sieu C. Septembre Duping that, due to my idiocy, his gift to me was destroyed? No, Watney, I shall not rest until I lay those two rascals by the heels!"

There being no arguing with Homes when he was in this mood, I turned to the morning *Times*, hoping to discover some interesting case which might take my friend's mind from his obsession. Suddenly, a new feature, imported from the American colonies, struck my eye.

"Homes!" I cried. "I do believe you will find this of interest."

He reached over and removed the journal from my hand. I watched his eyes narrow as he noted the design I had been studying. Suddenly he struck his fist upon the table, causing the chived chives to jump.

"There can be no doubt, Watney—it is they!" said he with deep satisfaction. "Note the silk topper worn by the shorter of the two—surely the sign of Harley Street affluence. And note the rather stupid expression on the face of his taller accomplice, for had he not been stupid he would never have crossed swords with Schlock Homes. A pity we should find them by pure chance, but better this way than not at all." He reached for his magnifying glass. "What are their names again?"

I came to read over his shoulder. "Mutt and Jeff."

"Precisely! A letter to the editor of the *Times* at once, Watney, if you will!"

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ACCIDENT

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"And I tell you this—it's the same woman—not a doubt of it!"

Captain Haydock looked into the eager, vehement face of his friend and sighed. He wished Evans would not be so positive and so jubilant. In the course of a career spent at sea, the old captain had learned to leave things that did not concern him well alone. His friend Evans, late C.I.D. Inspector, had a different philosophy of life. "Acting on information received—" had been his motto in early days, and he had improved on it to the extent of finding out his own information. Inspector Evans had been a very smart, wide-awake officer, and had justly earned the promotion which had been his. Even now, when he had retired from the force and settled down in the country cottage of his dreams, his professional instinct was still active.

"Don't often forget a face," he reiterated complacently. "Mrs. Anthony—yes, it's Mrs. Anthony right enough. When you said Mrs. Merrowdene—I knew her at once."

Captain Haydock stirred uneasily. The Merrowdenes were his nearest neighbors, barring Evans himself, and this identifying of Mrs. Merrowdene with a former heroine of a *cause celebre* distressed him.

"It's a long time ago," he said rather weakly.

"Nine years," said Evans, accurate as ever. "Nine years and three months. You remember the case?"

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"In a vague sort of way."

"Anthony turned out to be an arsenic eater," said Evans, "so they acquitted her."

"Well, why shouldn't they?"

"No reason in the world. Only verdict they could give on the evidence. Absolutely correct."

"Then, that's all right," said Haydock. "And I don't see what we're bothering about."

"Who's bothering?"

"I thought you were."

"Not at all."

"The thing's over and done with," summed up the Captain. "If Mrs. Merrowdene at one time of her life was unfortunate enough to be tried and acquitted for murder—"

"It's not usually considered unfortunate to be acquitted," put in Evans.

"You know what I mean," said Captain Haydock irritably. "If the poor lady has been through that harrowing experience it's no business of ours to rake it up, is it?"

Evans did not answer.

"Come now, Evans. The lady was innocent—you've just said so."

"I didn't say she was innocent. I said she was acquitted."

"It's the same thing."

"Not always."

Captain Haydock, who had commenced to tap his pipe out against the side of his chair, stopped, and sat up with a very alert expression.

"Hullo-ullo-ullo," he said. "The wind's in that quarter, is it? You think she wasn't innocent?"

"I wouldn't say that. I just—don't know. Anthony was in the habit of taking arsenic. His wife got it for him. One day, by mistake, he takes far too much. Was the mistake his or his wife's? Nobody could tell, and the jury very properly gave her the benefit of the doubt. That's all quite right and I'm not finding fault with it. All the same—I'd like to *know*."

Captain Haydock transferred his attention to his pipe once more.

"Well," he said comfortably. "It's none of our business."

"I'm not so sure. . ."

"But, surely—"

"Listen to me a minute. This man, Merrowdene—in his laboratory this evening, fiddling round with tests—you remember—"

"Yes. He mentioned Marsh's test for arsenic. Said *you* would know all about it—it was in *your* line—and chuckled. He wouldn't have said that if he'd thought for one moment—"

Evans interrupted him.

"You mean he wouldn't have said that if he *knew*. They've been married how

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long—six years, you told me? I bet you anything he has no idea his wife is the once notorious Mrs. Anthony."

"And he will certainly not know it from me," said Captain Haydock stiffly.

Evans paid no attention, but went on.

"You interrupted me just now. After Marsh's test, Merrowdene heated a substance in a test tube, the metallic residue he dissolved in water, and then precipitated it by adding silver nitrate. That was a test for chlorates. A neat unassuming little test. But I chanced to read these words in a book that stood open on the table. *H_2SO_4 decomposes chlorates with evolution of CL_{204}. If heated, violent explosions occur, the mixture ought therefore to be kept cool and only very small quantities used.*"

Haydock stared at his friend.

"Well, what about it?"

"Just this. In my profession we've got tests, too—tests for murder. There's adding up facts—weighing them, dissecting the residue when you've allowed for prejudice and the general inaccuracy of witnesses. But there's another test for murder—one that is fairly accurate, but rather—dangerous! *A murderer is seldom content with one crime.* Give him time and a lack of suspicion and he'll commit another. You catch a man—has he murdered his wife or hasn't he?—perhaps the case isn't very black against him. Look into his past—if you find that he's had several wives—and that they've all died, shall we say, rather curiously?—then you *know*! I'm not speaking legally, you understand. I'm speaking of moral certainty. Once you *know*, you can go ahead looking for evidence."

"Well?"

"I'm coming to the point. That's all right if there *is* a past to look into. But suppose you catch your murderer at his or her first crime? Then that test will be one from which you get no reaction. But the prisoner acquitted—starting life under another name. Will or will not the murderer repeat the crime?"

"That's a horrible idea."

"Do you still say it's none of our business?"

"Yes, I do. You've no reason to think that Mrs. Merrowdene is anything but a perfectly innocent woman."

The ex-Inspector was silent for a moment. Then he said slowly, "I told you that we looked into her past and found nothing. That's not quite true. There was a stepfather. As a girl of eighteen she had a fancy for some young man—and her

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stepfather exerted his authority to keep them apart. She and her stepfather went for a walk along a rather dangerous part of the cliff. There was an accident—the stepfather went too near the edge—it gave way and he went over and was killed."

"You don't think—"

"It was an accident. *Accident!* Anthony's overdose of arsenic was an accident. She'd never have been tried if it hadn't turned out there was another man—he sheered off, by the way. Looked as though he weren't satisfied even if the members of the jury were. I tell you, Haydock, where that woman is concerned I'm afraid of another—accident!"

The old Captain shrugged.

"Well, I don't know how you're going to guard against that."

"Neither do I," said Evans ruefully.

"I should leave well enough alone," said Captain Haydock. "No good ever came of butting into other people's affairs."

But that advice was not palatable to the ex-Inspector. He was a man of patience but determination. Taking leave of his friend, he sauntered down to the village, revolving in his mind the possibilities of some kind of successful action.

Turning into the post office to buy some stamps, he ran into the object of his solicitude, George Merrowdene. The former chemistry professor was a small dreamy-looking man, gentle and kindly in manner, and usually completely absent-minded. He recognized the other and greeted him amicably, stooping to recover the letters that the impact had caused him to drop on the ground. Evans stooped also and, more rapid in his movements than the other, secured them first, handing them back to their owner with an apology.

He glanced down at them in doing so and the address on the topmost envelope suddenly awakened all his suspicions anew. It bore the name of a well-known insurance firm.

Instantly his mind was made up. The guileless George Merrowdene hardly realized how it came about that he and the ex-Inspector were strolling down the village together, and still less could he have said how it came about that the conversation should come round to life insurance.

Evans had no difficulty in attaining his object. Merrowdene of his own accord volunteered the information that he had just insured his life for his wife's benefit, and asked Evans' opinion of the company in question.

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"I made some rather unwise investments," Merrowdene explained. "As a result, my income has diminished. If anything were to happen to me, my wife would be left very badly off. This insurance will put things right."

"She didn't object to the idea?" inquired Evans casually. "Some ladies do, you know. Feel it's unlucky—that sort of thing."

"Oh, Margaret is very practical," said Merrowdene, smiling. "Not at all superstitious. In fact, I believe it was her idea originally. She didn't like my being so worried."

Evans had got the information he wanted. He left the other shortly afterward and his lips were set in a grim line. The late Mr. Anthony had insured his life in his wife's favor a few weeks before his death.

Accustomed to rely on his instincts, Evans was perfectly sure in his own mind. But how to act was another matter. He wanted, not to arrest a criminal red-handed, but to prevent a crime being committed, and that was a very different and a very much more difficult thing.

All day he was thoughtful. There was a Primrose League Fête that afternoon held in the grounds of the local squire, and he went to it, indulging in the penny dip, guessing the weight of a pig, and shying at coconuts all with the same look of abstracted concentration on his face. He even indulged in half a crown's worth of Zara the Crystal Gazer, smiling a little to himself as he did so, remembering his own activities against fortunetellers in his official days.

He did not pay much heed to her singsong, droning voice till the end of a sentence held his attention.

"—and you will very shortly —very shortly indeed—be engaged on a matter of life or death—life or death to one person."

"Eh, what's that?" he asked abruptly.

"A decision—you have a decision to make. You must be very careful—very, very careful. If you were to make a mistake—the smallest mistake—"

"Yes?"

The fortuneteller shivered. Inspector Evans knew it was all nonsense, but he was nevertheless impressed.

"I warn you—*you must not make a mistake.* If you do, I see the result clearly, a death. . ."

Odd, damned odd! A death. Fancy her lighting on that!

"If I make a mistake a death will result? Is that it?"

"Yes."

"In that case," said Evans,

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rising to his feet and handing over half a crown, "I mustn't make a mistake, eh?"

He spoke lightly enough, but as he went out of the tent, his jaw set determinedly. Easy to say—not so easy to be sure of doing. He mustn't make a slip. A life, a valuable human life depended on it.

And there was no one to help him. He looked across at the figure of his friend Haydock in the distance. No help there. "Leave things alone," was Haydock's motto. And that wouldn't do here.

Haydock was talking to a woman. She moved away from him and came toward Evans, and the Inspector recognized her. It was Mrs. Merrowdene. On an impulse he put himself deliberately in her path.

Mrs. Merrowdene was rather a fine-looking woman. She had a broad serene brow, very beautiful brown eyes, and a placid expression. She had the look of an Italian Madonna which she heightened by parting her hair in the middle and looping it over her ears. She had a deep, rather sleepy voice.

She smiled up at Evans—a contented, welcoming smile.

"I thought it was you, Mrs. Anthony—I mean Mrs. Merrowdene," he said glibly.

He made the slip deliberately, watching her without seeming to do so. He saw her eyes widen, heard the quick intake of her breath. But her eyes did not falter. She gazed at him steadily and proudly.

"I was looking for my husband," she said quietly. "Have you seen him anywhere about?"

"He was over in that direction when I last saw him."

They went side by side in the direction indicated, chatting quietly and pleasantly. The Inspector felt his admiration mounting. What a woman! What self-command. What wonderful poise. A remarkable woman—and a very dangerous one, he felt sure—a very dangerous one.

He still felt uneasy, though he was satisfied with his initial step. He had let her know that he recognized her. That would put her on her guard. She would not dare attempt anything rash. There was the question of Merrowdene. If he could be warned. . .

They found the little man absently contemplating a china doll which had fallen to his share in the penny dip. His wife suggested home and he agreed eagerly. Mrs. Merrowdene turned to the Inspector.

"Won't you come back with us and have a quiet cup of tea, Mr. Evans?"

Was there a faint note of

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challenge in her voice? He thought there was.

"Thank you, Mrs. Merrowdene. I should like to very much."

They walked there, talking together of pleasant ordinary things. The sun shone, a breeze blew gently, everything around them was pleasant and ordinary.

Their maid was out at the Fête, Mrs. Merrowdene explained, when they arrived at the charming old-world cottage. She went into her room to remove her hat, returning to set out tea and boil the kettle on a little silver lamp. From a shelf near the fireplace she took three small bowls and saucers.

"We have some very special Chinese tea," she explained. "And we always drink it in the Chinese manner—out of bowls, not cups."

She broke off, peered into a cup and exchanged it for another, with an exclamation of annoyance.

"George, it's too bad of you. You've been taking these bowls again."

"I'm sorry, dear," said the professor apologetically. "They're such a convenient size. The ones I ordered haven't come."

"One of these days you'll poison us all," said his wife with a half laugh. "Mary finds them in the laboratory and brings them back here and never troubles to wash them out unless they've something very noticeable in them. Why, you were using one of them for potassium cyanide the other day. Really, George, it's frightfully dangerous."

Merrowdene looked a little irritated.

"Mary's no business to remove things from the laboratory. She's not to touch anything there."

"But we often leave our teacups there after tea. How is she to know? Be reasonable, dear."

The professor went into his laboratory, murmuring to himself, and with a smile Mrs. Merrowdene poured boiling water on the tea and blew out the flame of the little silver lamp.

Evans was puzzled. Yet a glimmering of light penetrated to him. For some reason or other Mrs. Merrowdene was showing her hand. Was this to be the "accident"? Was she speaking of all this so as deliberately to prepare her *alibi* beforehand? So that when, one day, the "accident" happened, he would be forced to give evidence in her favor? Stupid of her, if so, because before that—

Suddenly he drew in his breath. She had poured the tea

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into the three bowls. One she set before him, one before herself, the other she placed on a little table by the fire near the chair her husband usually sat in, and it was as she placed this last one on the table that a strange little smile curved round her lips. It was the smile that did it.

He knew!

A remarkable woman—a dangerous woman. No waiting—no preparation. This afternoon—this very afternoon—with him here as witness. The boldness of it took his breath away.

It was clever—it was damnably clever. He would be able to prove nothing. She counted on his not suspecting—simply because it was "so soon." A woman of lightning rapidity of thought and action.

He drew a deep breath and leaned forward.

"Mrs. Merrowdene, I'm a man of queer whims. Will you be very kind and indulge me in one of them?"

She looked inquiring but unsuspicious.

He rose, took the bowl from in front of her, and crossed to the little table where he substituted it for the other. This other he brought back and placed in front of her.

"I want to see you drink this."

Her eyes met his. They were steady, unfathomable. The color slowly drained from her face.

She stretched out her hand, raised the cup. He held his breath.

Supposing all along he had made a mistake.

She raised it to her lips—at the last moment, with a shudder, she leaned forward and quickly poured it into a pot containing a fern. Then she sat back and gazed at him defiantly.

He drew a long sigh of relief, and sat down again.

"Well?" she said.

Her voice had altered. It was slightly mocking, defiant.

He answered her soberly and quietly.

"You were a very clever woman, Mrs. Merrowdene. I think you understand me. There must be no—repetition. You know what I mean?"

"I know what you mean."

Her voice was even, devoid of expression. He nodded his head, satisfied. She was a clever woman, and she didn't want to be hanged.

"To your long life and to that of your husband," he said significantly and raised his tea to his lips.

Then his face changed. It contorted horribly. . .He tried to rise—to cry out. . .His body stiffened, his face went purple. He fell back sprawling over the chair, his limbs convulsed.

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Mrs. Merrowdene leaned forward, watching him. A little smile crossed her lips. She spoke to him, very softly and gently.

"You made a mistake, Mr. Evans. You thought I wanted to kill George. . .How stupid of you—how very stupid."

She sat there a minute longer looking at the dead man, the third man who had threatened to cross her path and separate her from the man she loved. . .

Her smile broadened. She looked more than ever like a Madonna. Then she raised her voice and called.

"George—George. . . Oh, do come here! I'm afraid there's been the most dreadful accident . . .Poor Mr. Evans . . ."

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THE LAST ONE TO KNOW

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

It was a big step for us, after all those years in the house, to move to an apartment, even a three-bedroom condominium only a few blocks inland from the lake. But we had both agreed—or said we did anyway—that it would be foolish to try to keep up that big old place just for the two of us now that the children were out on their own.

So an apartment seemed to be the answer. And actually once we made the move it wasn't too bad. A lot of the furniture had to go, of course. But the things we really wanted we kept. The third bedroom became Paul's study and was soon as cluttered with his books and papers as his den had been. And somehow the big walnut hutch with my good china and crystal was fitted into the dining area along with the old table and chairs.

We kept a lot of our old habits, too. Paul set up our portable grill on our little balcony, for example, so during nice weather we could continue our regular weekend cookouts.

I mention that in particular because, God help me, that's where it all started.

It was an ordinary Saturday in late May. We had company, I remember—the Smallwoods, George and Sheila. I'd never been particularly close to her, but he and Paul had similar jobs in different branches of the same company and office politics dictated that we exchange visits three or four times a year.

Neither of the men had worked that day, of course, and now they were out on the balcony nursing their drinks and getting the cookout fire "ready." Usually Paul has a great time poking and stirring the charcoal briquets until they're well burned down and covered uniformly with a fine coat of gray white ash. But this particular evening when I stuck my head out to see when they'd

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be ready for the food, both of them were ignoring the fire and staring bemusedly at the building opposite.

Curious to see what had caught their attention, I padded quietly up beside Paul and looked, too. And there in the apartment obliquely across from us a girl stood just inside her own balcony doors doing stretching and bending exercises. She was a stunning girl, tall and dark and clad in a black leotard.

"Now I've seen everything," I said. "The two of you ogling like moonstruck teen-agers."

Paul started and looked embarrassed, but George wasn't the least bit discomposed. "We weren't ogling, Myra," he said. "We were admiring. And there's no age limit on that."

"Lucky for you," I said, "because at the age you two are that's about all you can do. Anyway, call me when the fire's ready. *If* you can bring yourself to think about mundane things like that." And, laughing and shaking my head, I went back into the apartment to share the joke with Sheila.

Paul finally got the fire burned down the way he wanted it, cooked the steaks, and the four of us settled down to eat. I forget what we talked about, but it wasn't anything serious or important. And the Smallwoods made their excuses shortly afterward and left.

"We'll have to do this sometime again soon," Paul said after he'd closed the door behind them. "When they can stay longer."

"We may not have the chance," I said. "It's only a matter of time before they break up."

"What makes you say that? Did Sheila tell you something?"

"No," I said. "But I saw the way they acted. Very strained and formal. *And*," I added significantly, "she got very uptight when I told her about you two 'admiring' that girl. If she was as sure of George as I am of you, she'd have found it as funny as I did."

Paul regarded me quizzically. "You really did think that was funny, didn't you?" he said. "You know, Myra, I'm not at all sure that's very flattering."

Flattering or not, I still thought it was funny two days later and couldn't resist needling Paul slightly when he came home that evening from work.

"I'm sorry to tell you this," I said. "But I saw that girl you 'admired' so much on the phone today. And from the way she kept playing with the cord and smiling a little cat's smile while she was talking, it had to be a man she was talking to. A special man, too, because

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afterwards she got out her ironing board and started to iron a party dress."

Paul paused in the middle of taking off his coat. "What did you do, Myra," he said, "spend all day spying on her?"

"No," I said, "of course not. But she practically lives in front of those glass doors and never draws her drapes. And I'm out on our balcony a lot. You know how I am about fresh air. So I couldn't help but see what she was doing."

"I see," Paul said. He finished taking off his coat, hung it up, and went into the living room, loosening his tie.

I followed him. "Anyway," I said, "seeing her getting ready for her date gave me an idea. I've got a special man, too. So I got out *my* iron and ironed *my* party dress, figuring we could make a night of it, too."

Paul hesitated and even before he spoke I knew it hadn't worked. "Gee, Myra," he said, "I wish we could. And maybe we can tomorrow. But tonight I have to go back to the office."

"Go back to the office? In heaven's name why? You haven't worked overtime since your last promotion and that was years ago."

"I know," Paul said. "But workloads are building up, and the old man thinks the senior staff should set an example by putting in the same hours as the troops. I don't like the idea, but unfortunately he's the boss."

"So you may be working other nights as well," I said, trying not to sound desolate.

Paul nodded slowly. "Possibly," he said. "It all depends on what happens tonight."

On the optimistic assumption we wouldn't be eating in, I hadn't laid anything out for dinner. But I threw something together out of a couple of cans plus a frozen entree that didn't turn out too badly—although from the way Paul gulped his down it might have been ashes.

He left almost as soon as he'd finished eating, giving me a peck on the cheek as he went out the door. "Don't wait up," he said. "God knows when I'll be done."

"Sure," I said and closed the door after him. Then I turned back to the empty apartment. God, alone here all day and now all evening, too. It was almost too much to bear. Still, there it was, and I might as well make the best of it.

The first thing I did was turn off the air conditioner and start opening up the apartment. I felt better after I'd done that, less as if I were living in a closed-in shell sealed off from the rest of the world. Fortunately, too, there was a cool breeze coming

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in from the lake, and I stepped out onto the balcony to savor it.

Without my really willing it, my eyes slid over to the girl's apartment. She still hadn't drawn her drapes and I could see her clearly through the balcony doors, perched on the edge of a sofa so she wouldn't wrinkle her dress, and leafing through a magazine while she waited for her date to call.

I smiled wryly into the night. Enjoy it while you can, dear, because it doesn't last long. And when it's over, there isn't much to look forward to.

I rolled over in bed and rose on one elbow as Paul came in. He didn't turn on the lights but began to undress quickly in the dark.

"Hi," I said.

He made a startled movement. "I didn't mean to wake you," he said.

"I wasn't really asleep," I said. "What time is it?"

"Late," Paul said and went on undressing.

"I tried to call you earlier," I said. "Around nine. But nobody answered the phone."

"That must have been while I was in the boss's office," he said. "Sorry. Why did you call?"

"I just wanted to talk," I said. We were silent a moment. Then I said, "Will you have to work more nights?"

"I'm afraid so. Two, maybe three nights a week."

"For how long?"

"For as long as it lasts. But not tomorrow, though. I said we had something planned and I couldn't possibly get out of it."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it, forget it."

"That's not the way I feel about it," Paul said testily. "That's the way I *explained* it." He found his pajamas and started to put them on. "What did you do while I was gone?" he said.

"Nothing much," I said. "I *was* right about that girl across the way, though. Her boy friend picked her up shortly after you left for the office."

"Look, Myra," Paul said, getting into bed, "do me a favor, will you? Forget about that girl. A joke's a joke, but this one is beginning to wear a little thin."

"Sure," I said. I hesitated a moment, then moved closer to him. But he only groaned and rolled over on his side away from me. "God, I'm tired," he said. And a few minutes later I heard his deep regular breathing.

After a while I slept myself.

The next morning the cleaning lady came in to do the

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heavy work. I could have done it myself, should have, in fact. But I'd always had her to help at the house, and sheer inertia kept me from letting her go now that I no longer needed her. In any case, she came and I went out on the balcony to be out of her way. And so it was that I came to see the girl across the way once more.

It was late when she rose—close to noon—and she padded out from her bedroom to stand just inside her balcony doors and stretch like a great cat. Even without makeup and with her hair in a disarray from the night's sleep, there was just one word to describe her and that's the one I used before—stunning. I couldn't blame Paul for staring at her. If I'd have been a man, I wouldn't have been content with just staring; I'd have gone over and met her.

The cleaning woman called me inside then. But I saw her later in the day. She looked as if she'd just come in from shopping, because she was dressed for the street and carried a long flat box that she placed on the coffee table in front of her sofa and began to unpack carefully. It looked also as if things between her and her boy friend were going to get interesting before long, because what she held up to admire was a long filmy negligee.

So, of course, that evening while I was waiting for Paul to finish dressing, I couldn't resist going to the balcony and looking over at her. But the negligee was nowhere in evidence. She sat on the sofa again as she had the night before, but dressed this time in her bathrobe and with her hair in curlers.

What? I thought. No date tonight? Well, we can't be winners all the time, honey, and tonight's *my* night to howl.

But somehow the evening didn't turn out the way I'd hoped. We went to what had been our favorite restaurant, but it had been years since we'd been there last and it wasn't the same as we remembered. Or maybe we weren't the same. Or maybe it was just that the evening wasn't the spontaneous spur-of-the-moment affair I had intended. But whatever the reason, we didn't really enjoy ourselves and came home early.

More than a little disappointed, I slipped off my dress, pulled my robe over my slip, and went out onto the balcony to catch the last of the lake breeze. After a few moments Paul came out to stand beside me.

"Sorry the evening was such a flop," he said.

"It wasn't anybody's fault," I said. "It just happened that

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way. And," I added, nodding toward the other building where the dark-haired girl was visibly boredly watching TV, "at least I had a better evening than she did."

"Myra," Paul said, "I thought we agreed you weren't going to keep dragging that up."

"I'm not dragging anything up," I said. "I just commented that she didn't have a date tonight." After a moment I added thoughtfully, "And that's odd."

"Myra!"

"Don't 'Myra' me," I said. "It *is* odd, because a girl that good-looking shouldn't have any difficulty getting all the dates she wanted."

"Maybe she just didn't want one tonight," Paul said.

"No," I said, shaking my head, "that's not it. Because she's bored silly over there."

"Well, whatever the reason then," Paul said, taking my elbow firmly to lead me back into the apartment, "it's still no business of yours. Now come to bed. I've got a big day ahead of me tomorrow."

He was right, of course. It *was* no business of mine. But she'd piqued my curiosity, and I knew I wouldn't be content until it was satisfied.

I didn't see the girl at all the following day. I glanced over her way a couple of times, of course, but either she was out or our schedules didn't mesh. That evening, though, as I was opening up the apartment again after Paul had gone, I noticed her lights were on and that the drapes covering her balcon doors were unpulled. I hesitated a fraction of a second, then, flicking off the lights behind me, stepped out onto the darkened balcony for a better view.

For a while nothing stirred in the other apartment, but then just when I least expected it she moved in from the side outside my line of vision and began to rearrange things on the coffee table.

It was hard to tell what she had planned for the evening because she was dressed in a long housecoat, which could mean anything—or nothing. I felt a stir of encouragement, though, when she suddenly broke off what she was doing and moved purposefully out of my line of vision again. Obviously, she'd gone to answer the door. So the housecoat had to mean that they intended to spend the night in.

I was proved right a few minutes later when she reappeared behind the balcony doors, mussed and rumpled and laughing. I craned forward,

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waiting for her lover to join her so I could get a good look at him. But then suddenly she reached up and abruptly drew the drapes together.

I took an involuntary step backward as if physically affronted. A couple of seconds later, though, I realized there couldn't be anything personal in it. Looking out from the light, she couldn't possibly have seen me in the dark. Still, it was curious that she'd picked that particular moment to shut off her apartment. And it made me more curious than ever to get to the bottom of things over there.

It took me another two weeks of patient observation, but then I had my answer. And, of course, something this good I had to pass onto someone. Which is why I told Paul.

It was on another Saturday. He was back out on the balcony, fiddling with the grill, and the girl across the way was back doing her stretching and bending exercises where the whole world could see.

"Admiring again?" I said, stepping out to join Paul.

He had the grace to blush. I smiled and moved over to the railing. "It's taken a while," I said. "But I've finally figured her out. She's having an affair with a married man."

I wasn't prepared for the vehemence of Paul's response. "For God's sake, Myra," he exclaimed, "how can you say a thing like that about someone you've never met and don't know the first thing about?"

"Oh, I know quite a lot about her," I said. "I've been watching her. And she has a very strange on-again off-again love life. Three, sometimes four evenings a week she's given a terrific rush, but the rest of the time she's left to herself. And," I added significantly, "those dates are always on the same nights and never on a weekend. Now, how do you explain that those are the nights her boy friend has an excuse to be away from his family?"

"I wouldn't even try to explain it," Paul said, "because it's none of my business. What is my business, though, is that you seem to be spending all your time spying on a neighbor."

"That's not true," I said. "I was just curious and I did a little checking to satisfy that curiosity. But that's all."

"'But that's all,'" Paul said. He shook his head. "Seriously, Myra, I've been worried about you ever since we moved here. You've had entirely too much time on your hands. And that's not healthy."

"It would help," I said bitterly, "if you spent a little

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more time around here yourself. For all I see of you I might as well not have a husband."

He looked away. "If I could change things," he said, "I would. But I can't."

I put my hand out to touch his arm. "I didn't mean that," I said. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

Paul still wouldn't look at me. "Please, Myra," he said, "just find something to get you out of the apartment once in a while. And keep your mind off that girl."

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll find something. I promise."

It's funny how things work out. Because if I hadn't made that promise to Paul it never would have occurred to me to call Sheila Smallwood. And if I hadn't called Sheila, none of the rest would have happened, either.

"I don't know why I didn't think of this before," I said to Sheila when I had her on the line. "But it's foolish for both of us to sit home alone. So why don't we take in a movie or something while Paul and George are working tonight?"

There was a long moment of silence from Sheila's end of the line. Then: "I don't know what you mean, Myra. George hasn't worked nights in years. Has Paul?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "I thought all the senior staff were."

"Well, that's the first I've heard of it," Sheila said. "Although," she added too hastily, "just because George isn't working, that doesn't mean others aren't. And we can still get together if you like. Even if only to talk—"

"No," I said, putting the phone down. "No."

God, what a fool I'd been! But isn't that what they say? The wife is always the last one to know?

More sick than angry, I mechanically went through the routine of opening up the balcony doors, then just sat out there and let the darkness settle around me.

Paul and another woman! Because, of course, what else could it be? Some chit of a girl probably, from the office or—

My attention was diverted despite myself by a sudden movement in the building across the way—the girl pulling her drapes closed to signal the arrival of her lover.

I started to look away, no longer interested. But then my eyes swung back to those closed drapes and I was caught by a sudden thought. Why was she always so careful to close them *the moment her lover arrived?* Was it modesty? Or was it that

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she knew someone was watching—someone who would recognize the lover and spoil their little game?

Because the lover was Paul.

No, I told myself, that was crazy. Things like that just didn't happen. But even then other thoughts were crowding in: hadn't the start of her affair coincided with the start of Paul's working nights? Hadn't she been stuck home alone the one night Paul had taken me out? And the other nights her lover had called, weren't those also nights Paul had "worked?" I was sure they were.

Until at last I sat there faced with the awful realization that for the last month I'd been watching another woman carry on an affair with my husband.

That night I lay stiff and still, pretending sleep when Paul came in. The next morning, too, I waited until I was sure he was gone before getting up. Sooner or later I was going to have to face him, I knew. But not just yet, not until I had planned what I had to do next. Because a night of thinking it over—and over and over—had convinced me that the last thing I wanted was to lose Paul.

Not that things could ever be the same between us. But a divorce would leave me with nothing but an empty apartment and an emptier life. And that, above all, was what I didn't want.

The big question, though, was how could I prevent it? There was always the chance, of course, that if I pretended not to have noticed anything, the affair would burn itself out. It was an awfully big maybe, though, and could I really sit here alone night after night knowing what was going on across the way? But what other choices did I have?

Not many, I'm afraid. I couldn't compete with the girl on her own terms. Even in my heyday 20 years before I'd have been no match for her, and I didn't have to look in a mirror to know that the years in between hadn't been altogether kind. I didn't dare risk an out-and-out confrontation with Paul, either. At this stage of the game, forced to make a choice, he was probably infatuated enough to choose her.

Bitterly I went to the balcony and stared across. The girl had risen early today and was out on her own balcony smoking a before-breakfast cigarette. Damn, damn, damn you, I thought, wishing her ugly or dead or both.

Almost as if the thought had reached across to her, she straightened with insolent grace, flipped away the cig-

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arette, and strolled casually back into her apartment. Deliberately she left the drapes open and as I watched her move about it came to me. What I could do to beat her.

It was early that evening when I heard Paul come in. I got up from where I was sitting on the balcony and went back to our bedroom where he was in the process of unbuttoning his shirt.

"Hi," he said. "I didn't think you were home." He finished unbuttoning the shirt and pulled it off. "I just have time to change and run right back. There are some people in from Washington and I have to have dinner with them and then go over the final specs for a new contract." He broke off when he saw my face. "What's the matter?" he said. "Is something wrong?"

I shook my head and forced myself to smile. "No," I said. "I'm just disappointed. I'd hoped you'd be staying home tonight."

Paul mumbled something and turned to pick out a fresh tie. I came over, as I always did, found one that matched his suit and handed it to him.

"Would you like to hear something funny?" I said. "I was watching that girl across the way this afternoon—"

"Myra!" Paul said. "You said you were going to stop that."

"I know," I said. "And I really intended to. But then her lover showed up and I couldn't resist getting a peek at him."

Paul paused with his tie half knotted. "Her lover?"

"Well, it certainly wasn't her brother—not the way they carried on. But the funny part is that I must have been wrong about his being married. Actually he's quite young. And good-looking, too."

Paul didn't say anything, so I went on, as if the idea had just occurred to me. "But then maybe I wasn't wrong after all. Wouldn't it be something if she had a married lover to pay her bills and then was two-timing him with this younger one?"

"Yes," Paul said, and he pulled the knot in his tie tight with an abrupt, almost angry gesture.

After he had gone, I sat on the darkened balcony, waiting. Over across the way the girl waited, too. Then the by now familiar ritual began as she went to answer her door.

This time, though, it was quite a while before she came back into view, and there was now a tenseness and stiffness about her movements that had never been there before. She

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reached up to pull the drapes closed, then stopped abruptly in mid-act to turn and shout something back at her unseen companion. I couldn't hear the words, of course. But I could see the expression on her face, and it was angry. Good. This was even better than I'd hoped for when I'd deliberately sowed seeds of suspicion in Paul's mind.

Then as I watched, a hand lashed out from beyond the drapes to slap the girl savagely. She reeled back, stumbled, and fell toward the coffee table.

The story made quite a splash in the papers the next day: GIRL MURDERED IN LUXURY APARTMENT. I made a point of reading it to Paul at the table that evening.

"Good lord, Paul," I said, "it's that girl across the way! Look, here's her picture. And it says that the back of her head was smashed in—either from striking the edge of the coffee table or from a blow from some kind of club."

I looked up, pretending not to notice his white face and stricken expression. "I was right about her," I said. "She was two-timing somebody and he found out and killed her. I think I ought to go to the police."

"No," Paul said sharply. "What I mean is," he went on as I looked at him curiously, "you couldn't really tell them anything. Like names or who the men are. The police might even think you were making it up." He shook his head. "It's just better not to get involved."

I sighed. "I suppose you're right," I said and put the paper aside. "Do you have to work tonight?"

He shook his head again. "No. That's all over."

"I'm glad, " I said. "It's good to have you back."

Paul nodded and mumbled an excuse to go over to the liquor cabinet and pour himself his third stiff drink of the evening.

Poor Paul. I hope he isn't going to turn into an alcoholic over this—especially since he has no real reason to. Because I sat there for a long time that night watching the girl's apartment after she'd fallen. And I saw her get up again. From the way she staggered though, it was obvious she was alone and either hurt or at least groggy.

So it had been a simple matter, while Paul was off somewhere walking out his anger and frustration, to slip over to the other building, find the girl's apartment, and just to make sure he was never tempted again, finish what he'd begun.

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a *NEW* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

It started with the dangers of lead poisoning and ended with the brutal murder of Marlie Pratt. No, it really ended, as all homicides should end, with the arrest and conviction of the murderer . . .

Inspector Mitch Taylor has his usual run of luck, good, bad, and indifferent, with the emphasis on—but find out for yourself . . .

B AS IN BLUDGEON

by LAWRENCE TREAT

On his day off Inspector Mitch Taylor should have had more sense than to stay home. Because, right after Amy had gone out shopping and left him alone, the phone rang. And it had to be the dispatcher telling him something had turned up and they wanted him down at headquarters.

Only it wasn't the dispatcher. It was some dame all the way from Dallas, Texas, telling him he didn't have to worry about the shampoo soap in that tube, it couldn't hurt anybody, and besides, the company was giving up on lead and using aluminum.

Mitch said yeah a few times and figured either it was some crank or else the wires had got twisted, and he hung up. Then about five minutes later some other dame was calling from L.A. to tell the Taylor family pretty much the same stuff. This time Mitch managed to interrupt long enough to ask what it was all about, and it seemed that Amy had wanted to know whether you could get poisoned from using toothpaste out of a lead tube.

It was all news to Mitch, but it seemed Amy had got the big companies all het up about lead poisoning, because right after the L.A. dame, somebody called from Boston with pretty

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much the same pitch. Only this one, her voice was a little higher and she said there wasn't enough lead in a tube of ointment to kill a mouse.

That made three in a row and Mitch was thinking up a wisecrack or so for the next time around, and he had a pretty good one ready. He was going to ask why they were changing from lead if lead was okay. He figured that would shut them up, only he never got the chance to sound off. Because the next call was from the dispatcher telling him signal two-nine, which meant a homicide. It was up in the Short Hills section and a squad car would be waiting downstairs, so get going.

The cop who drove him, it was Malone from up in the Eighth Precinct, and it seemed he knew all about lead poisoning. He had a brother-in-law who was a house painter, and after twenty years the white lead finally got to him. He ended up with brain damage that left his hands so weak he could hardly hold a spoon. And he had a gray line along his gums. You ought to see him.

After that they got to talking about hospitals. Malone had just come out of one—he'd caught his hand in a car door on account he'd forgot to take it away when he'd slammed the thing shut. But the point was, the nurses weren't like they used to be. Now twenty years ago—

Mitch let him rattle on until they got to Short Hills, which was on the outskirts of the city and looked like real country, except for that stucco apartment house. It was kind of like a concrete block in a bird bath—too big, and it didn't belong there.

The usual bunch of cars were there in front of it, precinct and headquarters and press cars, along with an ambulance and Jub Freeman's traveling laboratory truck. Upstairs on the second floor the place was jammed and they were all talking about what a beating this Marlie Pratt had taken before she'd died. Mitch managed not to get a look at the body—it would have left him seeing it every time he stopped talking.

He didn't get much in the way of details, because as soon as Lieutenant Decker spotted him, the Lieutenant told him to check the neighborhood and see what he could dig up. The sort of woman Marlie had been, who her friends were, what they thought of her around here. And whether people had noticed anything yesterday afternoon, which was when the homicide had been committed.

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Any strangers, anything unusual—Mitch would know what to look for.

He was glad to get free of the mob, but before he left the place he got hold of Balenky who had been one of the first ones here and had the dope. It seemed that the dispatcher had got an anonymous call that there was a body in Marlie Pratt's apartment. The super, his name was Kutch and he had the apartment underneath Marlie's, had a key, so he unlocked the door for the police. Perkins was questioning him right now, and Balenky said it was even money Kutch had done it and that he'd confess before lunch.

"With all that blood around," Mitch said, "all you got to do is find the murderer's clothes, and you got him."

"Where?" Balenky said. "Where do you find 'em?" And when Mitch didn't answer, Balenky grinned and let the light hit that gold tooth of his. "Besides," he said, "the killer washed and scrubbed up, but good. Water's all over the bathroom and even leaked downstairs."

"Well," Mitch said, "I wish we could get this business over with. It's my day off and I want to get on back home."

"What were you doing?" Balenky asked.

"Loafing around, and thinking I ought to paint the ceiling." Mitch grunted, and added, "So maybe I'm lucky after all. You paint the ceiling and breathe in all that lead, and it's no good."

"Maybe," Balenky said. "But a lot of ceilings get painted. Matter of fact, I paint my own every couple of years."

"Gets you in the head," Mitch said, tapping his forehead and looking solemn, so Balenky wouldn't know he was being kidded. "I been noticing you. You want to watch yourself." And Mitch went off.

He had to shake loose from a couple of reporters on the way out, and he walked a block or so before he saw the shabby little store with a big awning that covered the newsstand and a soft-drink machine. The sign read JESSE'S, and a little guy with a long nose was standing or sitting at an open serving window. You could tell right off by the way he looked that he knew most of the neighborhood gossip and he'd tell you all about everything, and maybe he'd know what he was talking about and maybe he wouldn't.

Mitch fingered a paper, like he was a customer, before he started the conversation. "You heard about what happened?" he said.

The little guy cranked himself up in a nasal voice.

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"You kidding? All those cops and the TV truck, and then they had it on the radio. Marlie Pratt."

"You knew her?"

"Was talking to her yesterday, and a nicer dame you don't want to meet. Except she had those way-out ideas."

"What kind of ideas?"

"You know. Screwball stuff. Can't eat anything unless it's organic. Can't buy anything unless it's got some kind of a seal of approval. Won't use a spray can on account you breathe the stuff and maybe it's poison. Same thing with that you buy in tubes. 'They're lead tubes,' she says, 'and lead's a poison'."

"Where do you suppose she picked up an idea like that?" Mitch said, thinking mostly of Amy.

"I wouldn't know," Jesse said, "but I can tell you this—she don't know what she's talking about. And believe me, I got more sense than a lot of doctors do. You ask anybody around here and they'll tell you they come to Jesse's first, and then afterwards go to the doctor. Now the way I look at it, if you got something wrong with you, you got to have confidence that you're going to get better, and that's what I give them. Confidence. The body heals itself, so what can a doctor do that I can't, huh? Tell me that, Mister."

"You got something there," Mitch said, to kind of shove the guy along.

"You're a cop," Jesse said. "That's right, isn't it?"

"Sure."

"I like cops. A couple of months ago a cop came in here with his family. They'd been out in the fields near here and his kid had got in some poison ivy. Been playing in it, so the cop asks me if I got something for poison ivy, and you know what I told him?" Mitch didn't answer because he didn't have to. "I told him to go home and wash the kid with brown soap and hot water. Hot as he could stand it. That, and a tube of anti-itch, for a quarter."

"About Marlie," Mitch began, but Jesse wasn't ready to get around to her.

"I could have sold him anything I wanted to," Jesse said. "I could have sold him a bottle of something for a dollar, because I got a cure for anything. Take a look back there in the shop."

Mitch stared into the shadows behind Jesse and saw long rows of shelves stocked with cans and bottles and packages. Mitch couldn't read any of the labels, but he got the idea that all that stuff had been there for a long time and it wasn't selling

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so fast. Meanwhile Jesse kept right on talking.

"I got things you can't buy anywhere else in town," he said. "Good old-fashioned items that I only sell to my regular customers."

"Like Marlie?"

"Sure. Like Marlie. Maybe she didn't think the same way as me, but we got along."

"You say you saw her yesterday. Was she alone?"

"No. She was with this guy, he comes to see her maybe once a month, and they stop in here for a paper."

"Know his name?"

"She calls him corny."

"Cornelius," Mitch said. "Must be Cornelius."

"That's it," Jesse said. "That's what she called him. They'd been scrapping about something and they were so mad they wouldn't hardly talk to each other. He dropped his dime and when he bent down to pick it up, and he was having trouble getting it, she tried to step on his hand. What do you think of a dame who'd do that, huh?"

Mitch kind of muttered something and let the guy jabber on, but it was mostly a waste of time. Still, you had to listen, because you never knew when somebody was liable to come up with what you were really after.

After a while, though, Jesse ran out of steam, so Mitch paid for his paper and left. After that he spoke to a couple of kids and to a dame who took in washing, but he got nowheres.

By afternoon the homicide squad had about all they could find, so they turned things over to the guys in the Eighth and went back to headquarters. There, like always, they sat down in the squad room to see what they could figure out.

Decker led off. "Let me sum up where we stand," he said. "The M.E. tells us Marlie was killed late yesterday afternoon or evening, and she was beaten with a wooden instrument similar to the cricket bats that were hanging up on the wall and are now missing. Anybody here play cricket?"

It seemed nobody did, so the boss explained that a cricket bat was something like a baseball bat with the fat part flattened out, so you could hit a home run every shot. Only Marlie, she'd been hit with the thin edge and it had broken her skull, and she'd been out cold right from the beginning.

"If she hadn't been," Decker said, "she'd have screamed her head off. And brother, that would have been fine for us, because somebody would have heard her and called us. And that would have been that."

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The Lieutenant wrinkled up his puss and took a deep breath, like he was thinking of Marlie and didn't want to blame her for not yelling. Then he pulled at the corners of his mouth and got back to his facts.

"The killer," he said, "then washed up thoroughly. His clothes must have been badly stained with blood, and he either took them with him or else dropped them down the incinerator. And then he left, probably wearing Marlie's white shirt and blue jeans.

"Next, about that anonymous call. The super, name of Kutch, admitted he made it. It seems that the water leaked down into the Kutch kitchen, so this morning he went upstairs to see what the trouble was. He opened the apartment with his passkey, but he wanted none of what he saw, so he put in that call. You talked to him, Perk. Anything else there?"

"Nothing more that I got," Perkins said, "but I wouldn't cross him off the list. He claims he didn't hear anything because he was listening to a football game and he had the volume on high, but I've heard that one before."

"The rest of you," Decker said, "checked up on the other tenants in the building. A couple of them say that late yesterday afternoon they saw a guy in a white shirt and blue jeans walking down the street towards the bus stop. The bus drivers whose routes took them in the area around that time don't remember any such passenger."

Decker looked at some notes. "Marlie's married, but she's been separated from her husband for about two years. After the break-up she resumed her maiden name of Pratt. Her husband lives in Philadelphia, but we haven't been able to get in touch with him. Name's Cornelius Talbot. And that's where we stand now Any ideas? Anything else we ought to know?"

Mitch piped up with what Jesse had told him, so it seemed Marlie had seen her husband yesterday afternoon and they'd had a scrap. But whatever else, the first order of business was to get hold of him.

The Lieutenant told Mitch to get in touch with Philadelphia and find out what he could, so Mitch was at the phone on and off for the next couple of hours. He was lucky, too, on account he got hold of a Philadelphia cop named Epstein, and this Epstein was a wow. He checked up on Talbot and where he lived and what the neighbors knew about him and where he was, and it all added up.

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It seemed that Talbot was in a hole, on account Marlie wanted dough and he didn't have it, so he'd gone to see her and talk it over. He was the kind of a guy who never had much anyhow. Give him a buck and it went to the first panhandler with an honest mug on him, or else to the first kid who looked like he wanted an ice-cream cone. Which made Talbot a real softie, right down to the holes in his socks. Except everybody said he had a temper, and when he got sore you'd better watch yourself.

With that information Mitch called the airlines and found out that Talbot had taken a nine a.m. plane out of Philadelphia yesterday morning, and he had a reservation to come back at ten p.m. the same day, only he never showed up. So where was he?

With the case shaping up like that, it looked like it was just a matter of locating Talbot. Still, the Lieutenant had to go full steam ahead on all the other angles. It seemed that Jub Freeman had come up with a collection of hairs and assorted fibers. He had hair from two males and two females. One of the females was Marlie, the other one was a dame with light-brown hair that she was dyeing black. As for the males, they both had brownish hair, and from the descriptions of Talbot, that fitted him perfect.

On account Mitch ought to have had the day off and here he'd turned in a pretty good job, Decker told him to go on home. If they got hold of Talbot, they'd let Mitch know.

He got back a little after five and naturally he told Amy how all the big companies were calling long distance and trying to explain about lead in their toothpaste tubes.

"I'm sorry you were bothered," Amy said, "and maybe I shouldn't have sent those letters, but I did it because of a woman named Selma Cameron."

"Who's she?"

"I don't know, but she got my name from some list and she phoned me and asked me to write those letters. She kept calling me every day and nagging me, and I finally wrote the letters. Then she phoned again yesterday to make sure I'd sent them. She's so persistent, and I don't know what to do about her."

"If she calls again," Mitch said, "get hold of her number and then hang up. After that I'll handle her, I'll get her off your back."

"I know you will," Amy said, "and I have her phone number right here."

What with getting to the

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bottom of those long-distance calls this morning and feeling he'd got Amy settled down, Mitch felt pretty good. He slept fine and woke up with the feeling that the Marlie Pratt case was going to get wound up today. And when it was, he and Amy were going out and celebrate.

In the morning, though, things didn't look as good as Mitch had expected. Talbot hadn't gone back to Philadelphia and hadn't been located here. It looked more and more as if he was the guy they were after, because he'd been with Marlie and he had the motive and there was a half-empty bottle of bourbon with the label of a Philadelphia store that they'd found in her apartment. Then to pin it down, this Kutch who was the super, he said Marlie often went around in blue jeans and a white shirt. Which, Decker said, were no longer in her closet.

So the perpetrator must have left wearing her stuff instead of his own bloodstained clothes, and it all pointed to Talbot.

Still, they didn't have him in custody, not yet, and until they did they had to keep chasing down every clue they could get hold of. Which was why Decker started reading off the names in Marlie's address book and assigning them to the men to check up. But when he came to Selma Cameron, Mitch spoke up.

"I heard of her," he said. "She's a nut on food poisoning and stuff like that. Let me tackle her."

Decker nodded that it was okay, and at the end of the briefing session Mitch got his car, Number Four, and headed out for Jefferson Avenue, where the Cameron female lived.

She wasn't particularly tall, but she was the kind of a dame you don't tangle with unless you have to. The way she opened the door, she was ready to slam it back in your face and maybe throw you downstairs if she felt like it. Still, when Mitch showed his identification, she backed off and let him into her apartment.

The hallway where you came in, there wasn't too much light, but there was enough to show a bunch of photographs hanging on the walls. The pictures, they were teams, maybe women's soft ball and stuff like that. Then when Mitch stepped into the living room, the first thing he noticed was the pair of crossed cricket bats mounted over the fake fireplace. Then he took a good look at this female and he noticed she had black hair but you could see she'd dyed it because the roots were

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brownish and much lighter.

Mitch started easy, the way he always did. First off, he asked her whether she knew what had happened to Marlie and whether Marlie had been a friend of hers and when was the last time they'd seen each other. The Cameron answered straight out, nothing nervous about her. She said she hadn't seen Marlie for a week or so, although they usually saw each other pretty regular.

Along about then Mitch began to get the feeling that the Cameron dame was in this a lot deeper than she wanted him to think. So he fished around for a while, a little of this and a little of that, kind of trying to get the feel of things and wondering whether to bring up the Amy business. Only the Cameron dame did it for him.

"I think I've spoken to your wife," she said.

"That's right, and you been pestering her for quite a while."

"I talked to her about some consumer problems."

"Look," Mitch said. "You been nagging her, but from now on you're going to lay off. Understand?"

"Don't threaten me with your Gestapo methods," Cameron said.

Mitch figured she was just trying to get off the subject, so he came right back on. "You and Marlie were pretty thick, weren't you?" he said.

"We were lovers," Cameron answered. And the way she said it, kind of proud and daring him to fault her, it made him admire her.

"Sure," he said. "That's why you were so jealous of this guy she was going around with. That's what the fight was about." And he waited to see how she'd react. Because he had nothing particular in mind except to hope he could rile her. Only what happened was, she burst out laughing.

"Jealous of a *man*?" she said. "Me?"

Mitch let that one go, and he pointed to the cricket bats. "Where'd you get those?" he asked.

"I'm president of the American Women's Cricket Association. Since cricket bats cost so much, I import them wholesale and sell them here at cost, but I gave Marlie a pair free."

"These?" Mitch said, pointing.

"Of course not. Do you mean to say—"

Mitch interrupted. "I just want to know whether you hit her with these."

"Me?" Cameron yelled. And Mitch had the feeling he was finally getting somewheres, so he kept pushing.

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"Did you?" he demanded.

She practically spat out her answer. "No!" she yelled. "No—no—no!"

"Just take it easy and tell me where you were Sunday afternoon around five or six."

"I was in the mayor's office, knitting him a pair of woolen pajamas."

"Look," Mitch said. "Either you answer straight or you're going down to headquarters in a patrol car."

Her eyes, they'd been kind of brown and about normal in size, but now they narrowed and went black with gold dots in them. Mitch told himself that maybe that was the last thing Marlie ever saw, when Cameron was standing over her and beating her to a pulp.

With that he turned away and pointed to the bats. "She was killed with one of these," he said. "What did you do it for?"

He was still fishing. He figured he'd opened up a brand-new angle and right now he wasn't sure if it was Cameron or Talbot. But whatever he expected, what she did next just about knocked him for a loop. Because she crossed the room like she had a swarm of bees chasing her, and she grabbed the knob of the bedroom door and slapped it open.

"There!" she screamed. "There's your murderer—Cornelius Talbot, and just look at him!"

The guy lying there on the bed kind of lifted up his head and then let out a sigh, like he'd done all he could to escape and he hadn't made it, so now he was giving up.

"Talbot?" Mitch said. "Are you Cornelius Talbot?" And the guy nodded weakly. Which was a break if there ever was one.

Still, Mitch wasn't any too sure who'd killed Marlie. Maybe it was Talbot and maybe it was Cameron. But whichever it was, Mitch was certain of one thing: Cameron had knowingly harbored a fugitive from justice, and if she kept bothering Amy, Mitch would slap down, hard. And with that much settled, Mitch got down to the business in front of him, which was the kind of chance he didn't get any too often.

With the whole city looking for Talbot, Mitch had him along with a second suspect who was in this as deep as anybody. And while you usually don't let two suspects talk in front of each other, on account you don't want them to find out anything they didn't know before, still, with the pair of them here and all het up, this was the time to get them talking.

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"How'd you get here?" Mitch asked Talbot.

"I hardly know. Marlie and I had an argument on Sunday, and after I left her I walked around. But then I decided we had to talk things over a little more quietly, so I went back. She was lying there in blood—blood—"

Talbot stuck his hands in front of his face and kind of wagged his head, like he was still looking at Marlie and couldn't believe it. Which either was true, or else made him a damn good actor.

"So after you killed her, then what?" Mitch asked.

"I didn't kill her. I don't know who did. I can't even remember what I did after I saw her lying there, except that somehow I came here. Marlie had talked about Cameron, they were friends and I wanted to be with somebody who'd known her and loved her."

"You lost your head and killed her," Mitch said, still pushing it. "Remember now?"

"I didn't—I couldn't. Even if we were separated and I wasn't in love with her any more, she was still my wife. We'd had some good years together, so how could I hurt her?"

"Then what did you run away for?"

"I don't know. It was a shock, and I was exhausted. I don't know where I went, but I must have been walking all night long. For hours and hours. I didn't eat. I just walked. I don't know where. I don't even remember getting here."

"He killed her," Cameron said flatly. "I'm sure of it."

Talbot shook his head, and his jaw dropped. "I couldn't kill her. I couldn't kill anybody, even if I wanted to. My hands—they have no strength. I couldn't grip a bat no matter how hard I tried. Look!"

"How do I know—" Mitch began, but Talbot interrupted.

"Lead poisoning," he said, "from all the years I painted toys. The manufacturers bragged about them—expensive, hand-painted toys. Sure, with my hands! Let any doctor examine them."

"We'll do just that," Mitch said. "We'll go down to headquarters and have a doctor look you over." Then he turned to Cameron. "And you better come along, too."

"What for?"

"Harboring a fugitive from justice," Mitch said. "You knew we were looking for Talbot, didn't you?"

"Yes. I thought he'd killed her, but I couldn't make him admit it. I wasn't going to let him go until he confessed. Then *you* came along and had to

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stick your nose in my business."

"Not your business," Mitch said. "Ours."

About a half hour later he got back to headquarters with Talbot and the Cameron dame. He figured there ought to be brass bands playing and a citation waiting for him, but it didn't exactly work out that way. Instead, as he came down the corridor to the door marked *Homicide Squad*, Lieutenant Decker happened to step out.

"Oh, Taylor," he said casually. "Glad you're back. We got a confession out of Jesse after a couple of witnesses showed up and said they'd seen him leave the apartment Sunday afternoon wearing a white shirt and blue jeans. Which explains why our guy in blue jeans never got to the bus station. It was Jesse, and he only had to go as far as his shop."

"Why did he do it?" Mitch asked quietly.

"Marlie was ruining his business, with her talk about consumer education and how nobody should buy old stock, some of which had been condemned. That was about all that Jesse had—junk he'd bought cheap because it had been banned by the food and drug people. So he went to see her on Sunday afternoon to ask her to lay off. They had an argument and he lost his head and beat her up. We found the cricket bat in the back of his store." Decker frowned and glanced at Mitch's two prisoners. "Who are they?"

"Cornelius Talbot," Mitch said. "And Miss Cameron, who was a friend of Marlie's."

The Lieutenant nodded like this was pretty much what he'd expected. "Mr. Talbot," he said. "We've been looking for you, and we'll want a statement from you in a little while." Then he turned to the Cameron dame, who let fly.

"This man," she said. "This dim-witted, misguided policeman who arrested me under false pretenses and—"

Mitch kind of edged behind her, and as soon as he caught the Lieutenant's eye he gave him a wink. The Lieutenant nodded, okay, he'd cut her down to size, which he was good at. Only Cameron swung around and started after Mitch like she wasn't going to let him off so easy. So Mitch did the one thing that would get her off his back. He went on into the Men's Room.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The 27th adventure in detection and espionage of Rand, the head of the Department of Concealed Communications, known as the Double-C man . . . An urgent assignment brought Rand to the End of the Rainbow. Now, what should one expect to find at the end of the rainbow? A pot of gold, of course. But Rand found something else. Not gold-colored, but red, green, white, blue, orange, yellow, indigo, violet, and black—strangely enough, the colors of murder. . .

THE SPY AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Rand was in Cairo looking for Leila Gaad when he first heard about the End of the Rainbow. It had been nearly two years since they had fled the city together by helicopter with half the Egyptian Air Force in pursuit, but a great many things had changed in those two years. Most important, the Russians were gone. Only a few stragglers remained behind from the thousands of technicians and military advisers who had crowded the city back in those days.

Rand liked the city better without the Russians, though he was the first to admit that their departure had done little to ease tensions in the Middle East. There were still the terrorists and the almost weekly incidents, still the killings and the threats of war from both sides. In a world mainly at peace, Cairo was still a city where a spy could find work.

He'd come searching for Leila partly because he simply wanted to see her again, but mainly because one of her fellow archeologists at Cairo University had suddenly become a matter of deep concern to British Intelligence. It was

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not, at this point, a case for the Department of Concealed Communications, but Hastings had been quick to enlist Rand's help when it became obvious that his old friend Leila Gaad might have useful information.

So he was in Cairo on a warm April day. Unfortunately, Leila Gaad was not in Cairo. Rand had visited the University to ask about her, and been told by a smiling Greek professor, "Leila has gone to the End of the Rainbow."

"The end of the rainbow?" Rand asked, his mind conjuring up visions of pots of gold.

"The new resort hotel down on Foul Bay. There's a worldwide meeting of archeologists in progress, and two of our people are taking part."

It seemed too much to hope for, but Rand asked the question anyway. "Would the person accompanying Leila be Herbert Fanger, by any chance?"

The Greek's smile widened. "You know Professor Fanger, too?"

"Only by reputation."

"Yes, they are down there together, representing Cairo University. With the meeting in our country we could hardly ignore it."

"Are the Russians represented, too?"

"The Russians, the Americans, the British, the French, and the Chinese. It's a truly international event."

Rand took out his notebook. "I just think I might drop in on that meeting. Could you tell me how to get to the End of the Rainbow?"

Foul Bay was an inlet of the Red Sea, perched on its western shore in the southeastern corner of Egypt. (For Rand the ancient land would always be Egypt. He could never bring himself to call it the United Arab Republic.) It was located just north of the Sudanese border in an arid, rocky region that all but straddled the Tropic of Cancer. Rand thought it was probably the last place on earth that anyone would ever build a resort hotel.

But that was before his hired car turned off the main road and he saw the lush irrigated oasis, before he caught a glimpse of the sprawling group of white buildings overlooking the bay. He passed under a multihued sign announcing *The End of the Rainbow*, and was immediately on a rainbow-colored pavement that led directly to the largest of the buildings.

The first person he encountered after parking the car was an armed security guard. Rand wondered at the need for

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a guard in such a remote area, but he followed the man into the administrative area. A small Englishman wearing a knit summer suit rose from behind a large white desk to greet him. "What have we here?"

Rand presented his credentials. "It's important that I speak to Miss Leila Gaad. I understand she is a guest at this resort."

The man bowed slightly. "I am Felix Bollinger, manager of the End of the Rainbow. We're always pleased to have visitors, even from British Intelligence."

"I haven't seen all of it, but it's quite a place. Who owns it?"

"A London-based corporation. We're still under construction, really. This conference of archeologists is something of a test run for us."

"You did all this irrigation work, too?"

The small man nodded. "That was the most expensive part—that and cleaning up the bay. Now I'm petitioning the government to change the name from Foul Bay to Rainbow Bay. Foul Bay is hardly a designation to attract tourists."

"I wish you luck." Rand was looking out at the water, which still seemed a bit scummy to him.

"But you wanted to see Miss Gaad. According to the schedule of events, this is a free hour. I suspect you'll find her down at the pool with the others." He pointed to a door. "Out that way."

"Thank you."

"Ask her to show you around. You've never seen any place quite like the End of the Rainbow."

"I've decided that already."

Rand went out the door indicated and strolled down another rainbow-colored path to the pool area. A half-dozen people were splashing in the water, and it took him only a moment to pick out the bikini-clad figure of Leila Gaad. She was small and dark-haired, but with a swimmer's perfect body that glistened as she pulled herself from the pool.

"Hello again," he said, offering her a towel. "Remember me?"

She looked up at him, squinting against the sunlight. "It's Mr. Rand, isn't it?"

"You're still so formal."

Her face seemed even more youthful than he remembered, with high cheekbones and deep dark eyes that always seemed to be mocking him. "I'm afraid to ask what brings you here," she said.

"As usual, business." He glanced at the others in the pool. Four men, mostly middle-aged, and one woman who

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might have been Leila's age or a little older—perhaps 30. One man was obviously Oriental. The others, in bathing trunks, revealed no national traits that Rand could recognize. "Where could we talk?" he asked.

"Down by the bay?" She slipped a terrycloth jacket over her shoulders.

"Bollinger said you might show me around the place. How about that?"

"Fine." She led him back up the walk toward the main building where they encountered another man who looked younger than the others.

"Not leaving me already, are you?" he asked Leila.

"Just showing an old friend around. Mr. Rand, from London—this is Harvey Northgate, from Columbia University in the United States. He's here for the conference."

They shook hands and the American said, "Take good care of her, Rand. There are only two women in the place." He continued down the walk to the pool.

"Seems friendly enough," Rand observed.

"They're all friendly. It's the most fun I've ever had at one of these conferences." Glancing sideways at him, she asked, "But how did you manage to get back into the country? Did they drop you by parachute?"

"Hardly. You're back, aren't you?"

"But not without the University pulling strings. Then of course the Russians left and that eased things considerably." She had led him to a center court with white buildings on all sides. "Each building has nine large suites of rooms, and you can see there are nine buildings in the cluster, plus the administrative complex. Those eight are still being finished, though. Only the one we're occupying has been completed."

"That's only eighty-one units in all," Rand observed.

"Enough, at the rates they plan to charge! The rumor is that Bollinger's company wants to show a profit and then sell the whole thing to Hilton." They turned off the main path and she pointed to the colored stripes. "See? The colors of the rainbow show you where you're going. Follow the blue to the pool, the yellow to the lounge."

The completed building, like the others, was two stories high. There were four suites on the first floor and five on the floor above. "How are you able to afford all this?" Rand asked.

"There's a special rate for the conference because they're not fully open yet. And the University's paying for Professor Fanger and me." She led

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him down the hall of the building. "Each of these nine suites has a different color scheme—the seven colors of the spectrum, plus black and white. Here's mine—the orange suite. The walls, drapes, bedspreads, shower curtain—even the ash-trays and telephone—are all orange." She opened a ceramic orange cigarette box. "See, even orange cigarettes! Professor Fanger has yellow ones, and he doesn't even smoke."

"Who's in the black suite?"

"The American, Harvey Northgate. He was upset when he heard it, but the rooms are really quite nice. All the black is trimmed with white. I like all the suites, except maybe the purple. I told Bollinger he should make that one pink instead."

"You say Professor Fanger is in yellow?"

"Yes. It's so bright and cheerful!"

"I came out from London to check on the possibility that he might be a former Russian agent we've been hunting for years. We arrested a man in Liverpool last week and he listed Fanger as one of his former contacts."

Leila Gaad chuckled. "Have you ever met Herbert Fanger?"

"Not yet," he admitted.

"He's the most unlikely-looking spy imaginable."

"They make the best kind."

"No, really! He's fat and over forty, but he still imagines himself a ladies' man. He wears outlandish clothes, with loud colors most men wouldn't be caught dead in, even these days. He's hardly my idea of an unobtrusive secret agent."

"From what we hear, he's retired. He used the code name Sphinx while he was gathering information and passing it to Russia."

"If he's retired, why do you want to talk to him?"

"Because he knows a great deal, especially about the agents with whom he used to work. Some of those are retired now too, but others are still active, spying for one country or another."

"Where do I come in?" she asked suspiciously. "I've already swum the Nile and climbed the Great Pyramid for you, but I'm not going to betray Herbert Fanger to British Intelligence. He's a funny little man but I like him. What he was ten years ago is over and done with."

"At least you can introduce me, can't you?"

"I suppose so," she agreed reluctantly.

"Was he one of those at the pool?"

"Heavens, no! He'd never show up in bathing trunks. I

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imagine he's in the lounge watching television."

"Television, this far from Cairo?"

"It's closed-circuit, just for the resort. They show old movies."

Herbert Fanger was in the lounge as she'd predicted, but he wasn't watching old movies on television. He was deep in conversation with Bollinger, the resort manager. They separated when Rand and Leila entered the large room, and Bollinger said, "Well, Mr. Rand! Has she been showing you our place?"

"I'm doubly impressed now that I've seen it."

"Come back in the autumn when we're fully open. Then you'll really see something!"

"Could I get a room for tonight? It's a long drive back to Cairo."

Bollinger frowned and consulted his memory. "Let me see...The indigo suite is still vacant, if you'd like that."

"Fine."

"I'll get you the key. You can have the special rate, even though you're not part of the conference."

As he hurried away, Leila introduced Fanger. "Professor Herbert Fanger, perhaps the world's leading authority on Cleopatra and her era."

"Pleased to meet you," Rand said.

Fanger was wearing a bright-red sports shirt and checkered pants that did nothing to hide his protruding stomach. Seeing him, Rand had to admit he made a most unlikely-looking spy. "We were just talking about the place," he told Rand. "What do you think it cost?"

"I couldn't begin to guess."

"Tell them, Felix," he said as the manager returned with Rand's key.

Bollinger answered with a trace of pride. "With the irrigation and landscaping, plus cleaning up the bay, it will come close to seven million dollars. The highest cost per unit of any resort hotel."

Rand was impressed. But after a few more moments of chatting he remembered the reason for his trip. "Could I speak to you in private, Professor, about some research I'm doing?"

"Regarding Cleopatra?"

"Regarding the Sphinx."

There was a flicker of something in Fanger's eyes. He excused himself and went with Rand. When they were out of earshot he said, "You're British Intelligence, aren't you? Bollinger told me."

"Concealed communications, to be exact. I know this country, so they sent me to talk with you."

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"I've been retired since the mid-sixties."

"We know that. It took us that long to track you down. We're not after you, but you must have a great many names in your mind. We'd be willing to make a deal for those names."

Fanger's eyes flickered again. "I might be interested. I don't know. Coming here and talking to me openly could have been a mistake."

"You mean there's someone here who—"

"Look, Rand, I'm forty-seven years old and about that many pounds overweight. I retired before I got myself killed, and I don't know that I want to take any risks now. Espionage is a young man's game, always was. Your own Somerset Maugham quit it after World War One to write books. I quit it to chase women."

"Having any luck?"

"Here?" he snorted. "I think Leila's a twenty-eight-year-old virgin and the French one is pure bitch. Not much choice."

"Exactly what is the purpose of this conference?"

"Simply to discuss recent advances in archeology. Each of five nations sent a representative, and of course the University thought Leila and I should attend, too. There's nothing sinister about it—of that I can assure you!" But his eyes weren't quite so certain.

"Then why the armed guards patrolling the grounds?"

"You'd have to ask Bollinger—though I imagine he'd tell you there are occasional thieving nomads in the region. Without guards this place would be too tempting."

"How far is it to the nearest town?"

"More than a hundred miles overland to Aswan—nothing closer except native villages and lots of sand."

"An odd place to hold a conference. An odder place to build a plush resort."

"Once the Suez Canal is back in full operation, Bollinger expects to get most of his clientele by boat—wealthy yachtsmen and the like. Who knows? He might make a go of it. Once it's cleaned up, Foul Bay could make a natural anchorage."

They had strolled out of the building and around the cluster of white structures still in various stages of completion. Rand realized the trend of the conversation had got away from him. He'd not traveled all the way from London to discuss a resort hotel with Herbert Fanger. But then suddenly Leila reappeared with another of the male conferees—a distinguished white-haired man with a neatly

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trimmed Vandyke beard. Rand remembered seeing him lounging by the pool. Now he reached out to shake hands as Leila introduced him.

"Oh, Mr. Rand, here's a countryman of yours. Dr. Wayne Evans, from Oxford."

The bearded Dr. Evans grinned cheerfully. "Pleased to meet you, Rand. I always have to explain that I'm not a medical doctor and I'm not with the University. I simply live in Oxford and write books on various aspects of archeology."

"A pleasure to meet you in any event," Rand said. He saw that Fanger had taken advantage of the interruption to get away, but there would be time for him later. "I've been trying to get a straight answer as to what this conference is all about, but everyone seems rather vague about it."

Dr. Evans chuckled. "The best way to explain it is for you to sit in at our morning session. You may find it deadly dull, but at least you'll know as much as the rest of us."

"I'd enjoy it," Rand said. He watched Evans go down the walk, taking the path that led to the pool and then changing his mind and heading for the lounge. Then Rand turned his attention to Leila, who'd remained at his side.

"As long as you're here you can escort me to dinner tonight," she said. "Then your long drive won't have been a total waste."

He reacted to her impish smile with a grin of his own. "How do you know it's been a waste so far?"

"Because I've known Herbert Fanger for three years and never gotten a straight answer out of him yet. I don't imagine you did much better."

"You're quite correct," he admitted. "Come on, let's eat."

He checked in at the indigo suite he'd been assigned and found it not nearly as depressing as he'd expected from the color. Like the black suite, the dominant color had been liberally bordered in white, and the effect proved to be quite pleasant. He was beginning to think that the End of the Rainbow might catch on, if anyone could afford to stay there.

Over dinner Leila introduced him to the other conferees he hadn't met—Jeanne Bisset from France, Dr. Tao Liang from the People's Republic of China, and Ivan Rusanov from Russia. With Fanger and Northgate and Evans, whom he'd met previously, that made six attending the conference, not counting Leila herself.

"Dr. Tao should really be in

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the yellow suite," Rand observed quietly to Leila. "He would be if Bollinger had any imagination."

"And I suppose you'd have Rusanov in red?"

"Of course!"

"Well, he is, for your information. But Dr. Tao is green."

"That must leave the Frenchwoman, Jeanne Bisset, in violet."

"Wrong! She's white. Bollinger left indigo and violet empty, though now you have indigo."

"He implied that was the only suite empty. I wonder what's going on in violet."

"Nameless orgies, no doubt—with all you Englishmen on the premises."

"I should resent that," he said with a smile. She put him at ease, and he very much enjoyed her company.

After dinner the others split into various groups. Rand saw the Chinese and the Russian chatting, and the American, Harvey Northgate, walking off by himself. "With those other suites free, why do you think Bollinger insisted on giving the black one to the American?" Rand asked Leila as they strolled along the edge of the bay.

"Perhaps he's anti-American, who knows?"

"You don't take the whole thing very seriously."

"Should I, Mr. Rand?"

"Can't you find something else to call me?"

"I never knew your first name."

"C. Jeffery Rand, and I don't tell anyone what the C. stands for."

"You don't look like a Jeffery," she decided, cocking her head to gaze up at him. "You look more like a Winston."

"I may be Prime Minister someday."

She took his arm and steered him back toward the cluster of lighted buildings. "When you are, I'll walk along the water with you. Till then, we stay far away from it. The last time I was near water with you, I ended up swimming across the Nile to spy on a Russian houseboat!"

"It was fun, wasn't it?"

"Sure. So was climbing that pyramid in the middle of the night. My legs ached for days."

It was late by the time they returned to their building. Some people were still in the lounge, but the lights in most suites were out. "We grow tired early here," she said. "I suppose it's all the fresh air and exercise."

"I know what you mean. It was a long drive down this

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morning." He glanced at his watch and saw that it was already after ten. They'd strolled and chatted longer than he'd realized. "One thing first. I'd like to continue my conversation with Fanger if he's still up."

"Want me to come along?" she suggested. "Then we can both hear him say nothing."

"Come on. He might surprise you."

Fanger's yellow suite was at the rear of the first floor, near a fire exit. He didn't answer Rand's knock, and they were about to check the lounge when Rand noticed a drop of fresh orange paint on the carpet under the door. "This is odd."

"What?"

"Paint, and still wet."

"The door's unlocked, Rand."

They pushed it open and snapped on the overhead light. What they saw was unbelievable. The entire room—ceiling, walls, floor—had been splashed with paint of every color. There was red and blue and green and black and white and violet and orange—all haphazardly smeared over every surface in the room. Over it all, ashtrays and towels meant for other suites had been dumped and scattered. Fanger's yellow cigarette box was smashed on the floor, with blue and yellow cigarettes, green and indigo towels, even an orange ashtray, scattered around it. The suite was a surrealistic dream, as if at the end of the rainbow all the colors of the spectrum had been jumbled with white and black.

And crumpled in one corner, half hidden by a chair, was the body of Herbert Fanger. The red of his blood was almost indistinguishable from the paint that stained the yellow wall behind him. He'd been stabbed several times in the chest and abdomen.

"My God," Leila breathed. "It's a scene from hell!"

"Let's phone the nearest police," Rand said. "We need help here."

But as they turned to leave, a voice from the hall said, "I'm afraid that will be impossible, Mr. Rand. There will be no telephoning by anyone." Felix Bollinger stood there with one of his armed security guards, and the guard was pointing a pistol at them both.

Rand raised his hands reluctantly above his head, and at his side Leila Gaad said with a sigh, "You've done it to me again, haven't you, Rand?"

They were ushered into Bollinger's private office and the door was locked behind them. Only then did the security guard holster his

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revolver. He stood with his back to the door as Bollinger took a seat behind the desk.

"You must realize, Mr. Rand, that I cannot afford to have the End of the Rainbow implicated in a police investigation at this time."

"I'm beginning to realize it."

"You and Miss Gaad will be held here in my office until that room can be cleaned up and some disposition made of Herbert Fanger's body."

"And you expect me to keep silent about that?" Rand asked. "I'm here on an official mission concerning Herbert Fanger. His murder is a matter of great interest to the British government."

"This is no longer British soil, Mr. Rand. It has not been for some decades."

"But you are a British citizen."

"Only when it pleases me to be."

"What's going on here? Why the armed guards? Why was Fanger murdered?"

"It does not concern you, Mr. Rand."

"Did you kill him?"

"Hardly!"

Rand shifted in his chair. "Then the killer is one of the others. Turn me loose and I might be able to find him for you."

Bollinger's eyes narrowed. "Just how would you do that?"

"With all that paint splashed around, the killer must have gotten some on him. There was a spot of orange paint on the carpet outside the door, for instance, as if it had come off the bottom of a shoe. Let me examine everyone's clothing and I'll identify the murderer."

The manager was a man who reached quick decisions. "Very well, if I have your word you'll make no attempt to get in touch with the authorities."

"They have to be told sooner or later."

"Let's make it later. If we have the killer to hand over, it might not look quite so bad."

Rand got to his feet. "I'll want another look at Fanger's room. Put a guard on the door and don't do any cleaning up."

"What about the body?"

"It can stay there for now," Rand decided. "If we find the killer, it'll be in the next hour or so."

Leila followed him out of the office, still amazed. "How did you manage that? He had a gun on us ten minutes ago, and you talked your way out of it!"

"Not completely. Not yet. His security people will be watching us. Look, suppose you wake everyone up and get them down by the pool."

"All right," she agreed. "But what for?"

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"We're going to look for paint spots."

The American, Harvey Northgate, refused to be examined at first. And the Russian demanded to call his Embassy in Cairo. But after Rand explained what it was all about, they seemed to calm down. The only trouble was, Rand and Leila could find no paint on any of them. It seemed impossible, but it was true. Rand's hope of reaching a quick solution to the mystery burst like an over-inflated balloon.

It was Bollinger himself who provided an explanation, when the others had been allowed to return to their beds. "I discovered where the paint cans and the rest of it came from. Look, the side exit from this building is only a few steps away from the side exit to that building still under construction. Just inside the door are paint cans, boxes of towels and ashtrays, and even a pair of painter's coveralls."

"Show me," Rand said. He looked around for Leila but she was gone. Perhaps the day really had tired her out.

The resort manager led Rand to the unfinished building. Looking at the piles of paint cans, Rand had little doubt that this was the source of the vandal's supplies. He opened a box of red bath towels, and a carton of blue ashtrays. "Anything else here?" he asked.

"Just drapes. Apparently he didn't have time for those."

"What about the carpeting? And soap and cigarettes?"

"They're stored in one of the other buildings. He just took what was close at hand. And he wore a painter's coveralls over his own clothes."

"I suppose so," Rand agreed. The splotches of paint seemed fresh, still tacky to his touch. "What I'd like to know is why—why risk discovery by going after that paint and the other things? He had to make at least two trips, one with the paint cans and the second to return the coveralls and probably gather up a few other things to throw around the room. Who knew these things were here?"

"They all did. I took them on a tour of the place the first day and showed them in here."

"Coveralls," Rand mused, "but no shoes. The shoes with the orange paint might still turn up."

"Or might not. He could have tossed them into the bay."

"All right," Rand conceded. "I'm at a dead end. We'll have to call in the authorities."

"No."

"What do you mean, no?"

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"Just what I said. The people here don't want publicity. Nor do I."

"They're not archeologists, are they?"

"Not exactly," Bollinger admitted.

"Then what were Leila and Fanger doing here?"

"A mistake. Cairo University believed our cover story and sent them down for the conference. Fanger, a retired agent himself, knew something was wrong from the beginning. Then you came, and it scared one of them enough to commit murder."

"You have to tell me what's going on here," Rand said.

"A conference."

"Britain, America, France, Russia, and China. A secret conference in the middle of nowhere, policed by armed guards." He remembered something. "And what about the violet room? Who's in there?"

"You ask too many questions. Here's a list of all our guests."

Rand accepted the paper and scanned it quickly, refreshing his memory:

First Floor: Red—Ivan Rusanov (Russia)

Orange—Leila Gaad (Egypt)

Yellow—Herbert Fanger (Egypt)

Green—Dr. Tao Liang (China)

Second Floor: Blue—Dr. Wayne Evans (Britain)

Indigo—Rand

Violet—

White—Jeanne Bisset (France)

Black—Harvey Northgate (U.S.)

"The violet suite is empty?" Rand questioned.

"It is empty."

Rand pocketed the list. "I'm going to look around."

"We've cut the telephone service. It will do you no good to try phoning out. Only the hotel extensions are still in operation."

"Thanks for saving me the effort." He had another thought. "You know, this list doesn't include some very good suspects—yourself and your employees."

"I would never have created that havoc. And my guards would have used a gun rather than a knife."

"What about the cooks and maids? The painters working on the other buildings?"

"Question them if you wish," he said. "You'll discover nothing."

Rand left him and cut through the lounge to the stairway. He was anxious to check out that violet suite. It was now after midnight, and there was no sign of the others, though he hardly believed

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they were all in their beds.

He paused before the violet door and tried the knob. It was unlocked, and he wondered if he'd find another body. Fanger's door had been left unlocked so that the killer could return with the paint cans. He wondered why this one was unlocked. But he didn't wonder long.

"Felix? Is that you?" a woman's voice called from the bedroom. It was the Frenchwoman, Jeanne Bisset.

"No, just me," Rand said, snapping on the overhead light.

She sat up in bed, startled. "What are you doing here?"

"It's as much my room as yours. I'm sorry Felix Bollinger was delayed. It's been a busy night."

"I. . ."

"You don't have to explain. I was wondering why he kept this suite vacant, and now I know." He glanced around at the violet furnishings, deciding it was the least attractive of those he'd seen.

"Have you found the killer?" she asked, recovering her composure. She was a handsome woman, older than Leila, and Rand wondered if she and Bollinger had known each other before this week.

"Not yet," he admitted. "It might help if you were frank with me."

She blinked her eyes. "About what?"

"The purpose of this conference."

She thought about that. Finally she said, "Hand me a cigarette from my purse and I'll tell you what I know."

He reached in, found a case full of white cigarettes ringed in black, and passed her one. "Is the house brand any good?" he asked. "I used to smoke American cigarettes all the time, but I managed to give them up."

"They're free and available," she said, lighting one. "Something like Felix Bollinger himself."

"You were going to talk about the conference," he reminded her.

"Yes, the conference. A gathering of do-gooders trying to change the world. But the world cannot be changed, can it?"

"That all depends. You're not archeologists, then?"

"No. Although the Russian, Rusanov, knew enough about it to fake a few lectures after Fanger and Miss Gaad turned up. No, Mr. Rand, in truth we're nothing more than peace activists. Our five nations—America, France, Britain, China, Russia—are the only ones who have perfected nuclear weapons."

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"Of course! I should have realized that!"

"We are meeting here—with funds provided by peace groups and ban-the-bomb committees in our homelands—to work out some coordinated effort. As you can see, we're no young hippies but sincere middle-aged idealists."

"But why only the five of you? And why out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"A larger meeting would have attracted the press—which would have been especially dangerous for Dr. Tao and Ivan when they returned home. We heard of this place, just being built, and it seemed perfect for our purpose."

"Do you remember who actually suggested it?"

She blushed prettily. "As a matter of fact, I did. I'd met Felix Bollinger in Paris last year, and—"

"I understand," Rand said. "You sent out some sort of announcement to the press to cover yourselves, and Cairo University believed it."

"Exactly."

"Which one of you did Fanger recognize?"

She looked blank. "He didn't admit to knowing any of us."

"All right," Rand said with a sigh. "Thanks for the information."

He left and went in search of Leila Gaad.

He found her finally in her room—the last place he thought of looking. The orange walls and drapes assaulted his eyes, but she seemed to enjoy the decor. "I think I've found our murderer," she announced. "And I've also found a concealed communication for you to ponder."

"I thought this was going to be one case without it. First tell me who the killer is."

"The American—Northgate! I found this pair of shoes in the rubbish by the incinerator. See—orange paint on the bottom! And they're American-made shoes!"

"Hardly conclusive evidence. But interesting. What about the concealed communication?"

She held a little notebook aloft triumphantly. "I went back to Professor Fanger's room and found this among his things. He was always writing in it, and I thought it might give us a clue. Look here—on the very last page, in his handwriting. *Invite to room, confirm tritan.*"

"Tritan? What's that?"

"Well, he spelled it wrong, I guess, but Triton is a mythological creature having the body of a man and the tail of a fish—sort of male version of a

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mermaid. That would imply a good swimmer, wouldn't it? And seeing them all around the pool, I can tell you Northgate is the best swimmer of the lot."

"Fanger was going to confirm this in his room? How—by flooding the place?"

"Well. . ." She paused uncertainly. "What else could it mean?"

Rand didn't answer. Instead he said, "Come on. Let's go see Northgate."

The American answered the door with sleepy eyes and a growling voice. "Don't you know it's the middle of the night?" Rand held out the shoes for him to see, and he fell silent.

"Going to let us in?"

"All right," he said grudgingly, stepping aside.

"These are your shoes, aren't they?"

There was little point in denying it. "Yes, they're mine."

"And you were in the room after Fanger was murdered?"

"I was there, but I didn't kill him. He was already dead. He'd invited me up for a nightcap. The door was unlocked and when I went in I found him dead and the room a terrible mess. I was afraid I'd be implicated so I left, but I discovered later I'd stepped in some orange paint. When you got us all out by the pool to search for paint spots I panicked and threw the shoes away."

Rand tended to believe him. The real murderer would have done a better job of disposing of the incriminating shoes. "All right," he said. "Now let's talk about the conference. Jeanne Bisset has already told me its real purpose—to work for nuclear disarmament in your five nations. Did Fanger have any idea of this?"

"I think he was onto something," the American admitted. "That's why he wanted to see me. He wanted to ask me about one of the others in the group—someone he thought he knew."

"Which one?"

"He was dead before he could tell me."

"What damage could a spy do at this conference?" Rand asked.

Northgate thought about it. "Not very much. I suppose if he was in the pay of the Russians or Chinese he could report the names of Rusanov and Dr. Tao to their governments, but that would be about all."

"I may have more questions for you later," Rand said.

"He was probably killed by one of the Arab employees," Northgate suggested as Rand and Leila headed for the door.

Back downstairs, Leila said,

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"Maybe he's right. Maybe it was just a robbery killing."

"Then why go to such lengths with the paint and the other things? There was a reason for it, and the only sane reason had to be to hide the killer's identity."

Leila took out one of her orange cigarettes. "Splashing paint around a hotel room to hide a killer's identity? How?"

"That's what I don't know." He produced the dead man's notebook again and stared at the final message: *Invite to room, confirm tritan.* It wasn't Triton misspelled. A professor at Cairo University wouldn't make a mistake like that.

His eyes wandered to Leila's cigarette, and suddenly he knew.

Dr. Wayne Evans opened the door for them. His hair and beard were neatly in place, and it was obvious he hadn't been sleeping. "Well, what's this?" he asked. "More investigation?"

"The final one, Dr. Evans," Rand said, glancing about the blue suite. "You killed Professor Fanger."

"Oh, come now!" Evans glanced at Leila to see if she believed it.

"You killed him because he recognized you as a spy he used to deal with. He invited you to his suite to confirm it, and when he confronted you with it there was a struggle and you killed him. I suppose it was the beard that made him uncertain of your identity at first."

"Is this any way to talk to a fellow countryman, Rand? I'm here on an important mission."

"I can guess your mission—to sabotage this conference."

Evans took a step backward. He seemed to be weighing the possibilities. "You think I killed him and messed up the room like that?"

"Yes. The room was painted like a rainbow, and strewn with towels and things from the next building. But just a little while ago I remembered there were cigarettes strewn on that floor too, next to the broken ceramic box they were in. There were no cigarettes stored in the next building. I think while you were struggling with Fanger he ripped your pocket. The cigarettes from your suite tumbled out, just as the table was overturned and his own cigarette box smashed. Your cigarettes and his cigarettes mingled on the floor. And that was the reason for the entire thing—the reason the room had to be splashed with paint and all the rest of it. To hide the presence of those blue cigarettes."

Dr. Wayne Evans snorted. "A likely story! I could have

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just picked up the blue ones, you know."

"But you couldn't have," Rand said. "Because you're color-blind."

That was when Evans moved. He grabbed Leila and had her before Rand could react. The knife in his hand had appeared as if by magic, pressed against her throat. "All right, Rand," he said very quietly. "Out of my way or the girl dies. Another killing won't matter to me."

Rand cursed himself for being caught off guard, cursed himself again for having Leila there in the first place. "Rand," she gasped as the blade of the knife pressed harder against her flesh.

"All right," he said. "Let her go."

"Call Bollinger. Tell him I want a car with a full petrol tank and an extra emergency can. I want it out in front in ten minutes or the girl dies."

Rand obeyed, speaking in clipped tones to the manager. When he'd hung up, Evans backed against the door, still holding Leila. "Can't we talk about this?" Rand suggested. "I didn't come to this place looking for you. It was only chance—what happened, I mean."

"How'd you know I am color-blind?"

"Fanger left a notation in his notebook. *Invite to room, confirm tritan.* He was simply abbreviating tritanopia—a vision defect in which the retina fails to respond to the colors blue and yellow. It's not as common as red-green blindness, and when Fanger thought he recognized you he knew he could confirm it by having you up to his yellow room. By a quirk of fate you'd been placed in the blue suite yourself. And when you dropped the cigarettes during the struggle, you had only two choices—pick up *all* the cigarettes, blue and yellow alike, or leave them all and somehow disguise their presence."

"Make it short," Evans said. "I'm leaving in three minutes."

"If you took all the cigarettes you risked having them found on you before you could dispose of them. Even if you flushed them down the toilet, a problem remained. Fanger was a known nonsmoker. The broken cigarette box would call attention to the missing cigarettes, and the police would wonder why the killer took them away. If your color blindness became known, someone might even guess the truth. But splashing the room with paint, using every color you could find, not only camouflaged the cigarettes but

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also directed attention, in a very subtle manner, *away* from a color-blind person."

Evans reached behind him to open the door. "You're too smart, Rand."

"Not really. Once I suspected your color blindness, I remembered your momentary confusion on those rainbow-colored paths yesterday, when you started down the blue path to the pool and then changed your mind and took the yellow one to the lounge. Of course both colors only looked gray to your eyes."

"Walk backward," Evans told Leila. "You're coming with me."

"Who paid you to spy on the conference?" Rand asked. "What country?"

"Country?" Evans snorted. "I worked for countries when Fanger knew me. Now I work where the real money is."

He moved down the hall, dragging Leila with him, and Rand followed. Felix Bollinger was standing by the door, holding it open, the perfect manager directing a departing guest to his waiting car.

"Out of my way," Evans told him.

"I hope your stay was a pleasant one," Bollinger said. Then he brought a gun from behind his back and shot Evans once in the head. . .

Leila Gaad downed a stiff shot of Scotch and said to Rand, "You would have let him go, just to save me! I must say that wasn't very professional of you."

"I have my weaknesses," Rand admitted.

Felix Bollinger downed his own drink and reached again for the bottle he'd supplied. "A terrible opening for my resort. The home office won't be pleased."

"Who was paying Evans?" Leila asked. "And paying him for what?"

"We'll have to check on him," Rand said. "But I suppose there are various pressures in today's world working against disarmament. In America sometimes they're called things like the military-industrial complex. In other nations they have other names. But they have money, and perhaps they're taking over where some of the governments leave off. When we find out who was paying Evans, it might well be a company building rockets in America, or submarines in Russia, or fighter planes in France."

"Is there no place left to escape?" Leila asked.

And Felix Bollinger supplied the answer. "No, my dear, there is not. Not even here, at the End of the Rainbow."

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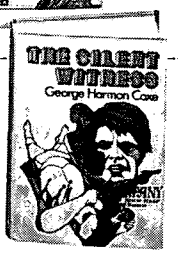

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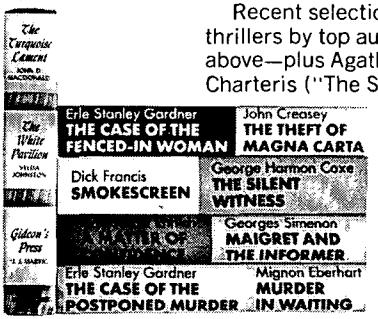

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